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S E R M O N S

BY FATHERS

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

VOLUME I.

LONDON:

BURNS, OATES, AND COMPANY, PORTMAN STREET.

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SERMONS

BY FATHERS

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

Part the First.

I.—THE LATTER DAYS.

(Four Sermons.)

II.—THE TEMPTATIONS OF OUR LORD.

(Four Sermons.)

LONDON:

BURNS, OATES, AND COMPANY, PORTMAN STREET,
AND PATERNOSTER ROW.

1869.

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THE LATTER DAYS.

FOUR SERMONS

BY THE

REV. HENRY J. COLERIDGE,

Of the Society of Jesus.

- I. PROPHECIES OF THE END OF THE WORLD.
- II. THE MAN OF SIN.
- III. THE GREAT APOSTACY.
- IV. ALL THINGS MADE NEW.

SUMMARY.

SERMON I.

PROPHECIES OF THE END OF THE WORLD.

Maria autem conservabat omnia verba hæc, conferens in corde suo.

But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.

(St. Luke ii. 19.)

INTRODUCTION.—The Church prepares us for the celebration of the anniversary of our Lord's first advent, by considerations concerning His second coming.

The temper in which the prophecies are to be examined is that of which we have an example in our Blessed Lady. Danger of a contrary method.

I. Blending of the two advents in prophecy. Malachias. St. John the Baptist. Frequent mention of the Judgment by our Lord and the Apostles, and this at the most critical times. The close of our Lord's teaching. Our Lord's words to Caiaphas. The Angels at the Ascension. St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, on the occasion of the first miracle after Pentecost, and of the admission of Cornelius to the Church. St. Paul appeals to the anticipations of the Judgment when preaching at Athens to Gentile philosophers, and before Felix the Roman Governor. The doctrine of the Judgment a part of the elementary teaching of the Apostles. Instance of the Thessalonians. Expectations of the earliest Christians, to be found also among the Saints in all generations, as St. Cyprian, St. Jerome, St. Chrysostom, St. Gregory the Great, St. Bernard, and St. Vincent Ferrer. Contrast presented by the men of our time, who seem to fulfil the prophecy of St. Peter (2 Epist. iii. 4), and that of our Lord as to the unexpectedness of His coming.

II. Explanation of these expectations. The end of the world to each one of us is the day of death. The chief features of the prophecy, also, serve to explain them. *Antichrist*, the Man of Sin. His coming was made known to the early Christians by the Apostles. Reason for this. *The great apostacy* spoken of by St. Paul. *The removal of the power which at that time withheld Antichrist*. Interpretation of this by the Fathers. It appears to mean the principle of government and law on which society is built. The Church presupposes this, and its destruction might lead to a triumph of her enemies. *The signs in the physical universe*, foretold by our Lord. *Moral signs*, such as the conversion of the Jews. *Antichrist*, the apostacy, and the subversion of the principles

of society, embody principles and movements which have been at work in the past and are at work now. Anticipations of Antichrist. Of the apostasy, in the early heresies, in Mahometanism, in the Greek schism, and in the Reformation. Our own times. Great attacks on civil society. The exertions of Pius IX. to save it, as well as Christian dogma and the rights of the Church.

CONCLUSION.—Our own duties with regard to the principles of evil now at work in the world.

SERMON II.

THE MAN OF SIN.

Veni in nomine Patris Mei, et non accipitis Me; si alius venerit in nomine suo, illum accipietis.

I am come in the name of My Father, and you receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive. (St. John v. 43.)

INTRODUCTION.—Ancient belief that Antichrist would be a Jew, and be received by the Jews. The law of Providence by which those who reject God and our Lord are enslaved by His and their enemies.

I. Wide range in Scripture of the prophecies concerning Antichrist. Traces of the prediction in Genesis and Ezekiel, in Daniel, in St. Paul, St. Peter, St. Jude, and St. John, and especially in the Apocalypse. Many of the details are obscure, because the prophecies sometimes refer to types and anticipations of Antichrist. It is sufficient to attend to the general features of the prediction. Antichrist is to be a single person, not a principle or a power. He is not a demon incarnate. He will have the same assistance from God as other men, but it is thought he will be depraved and corrupted in early youth. His sudden rise, great abilities, power, and success. His character as drawn by the Fathers. He is the author of a new religion, makes himself the Messiah, and is worshipped as God. His false miracles. His cruel persecution of the Church. He will forbid the Holy Mass, and make the profession of his religion of legal obligation, enforced by death. He is to be opposed by Enoch and Elias, whom he will slay, and then be himself destroyed by the coming of our Lord.

II. We are not to suppose that the state of the world must be altogether changed in order to make Antichrist possible. Satan will have greater power at the last, but Antichrist will be in harmony with the mind and feelings of his own generation, and would be with ours. All evil is wrought under the name of good. Antichrist will be considered as a deliverer from superstition and old fables about God, conscience, sin, and judgment, and as such will be hailed with enthusiasm. He will also have the special fascination of immense success. Men are easily led to worship great talents and splendid achievements, apart from all considerations of justice or virtue. Men are always ready to applaud any great opponent of Jesus Christ. Instance of the triumph of Voltaire just before his death. Antichrist will also have the aid of lying wonders, and of the delusion which God will permit as a punishment for the ingratitude of men.

CONCLUSION.—We must endeavour always to recognise, as the

Saints have done, the workings of the power of Satan in the world. St. Catharine of Siena. We are never to do homage to the world's idols, but to make our Lord's character the measure of all goodness, and to exert ourselves in our own day against the powers of evil which assault the Church.

SERMON III.

THE GREAT APOSTACY.

Veruntamen Filius Hominis veniens, putas, inveniet fidem in terra?

But yet the Son of Man when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith upon earth ?
(St. Luke xviii. 8.)

INTRODUCTION.—Our Lord's question as to the existence of the Faith at His coming. The Elect cannot be seduced, and the Church will not fail. But it seems that there will be in the latter days a great apostacy.

Some rules as to the interpretation of the prophecies of the end of the world. The life of the Church is one and continuous to the Apostles and Prophets, and "a thousand years are as one day." They speak of the latter days as imminent, because the Church is always the same. They speak also of the forms of evil which were to beset the generations which followed their own closely. The principles of evil are the same in all generations.

I. Extent of the prophecies as to the last apostacy. Words of Daniel, our Lord Himself, St. Peter, and St. Jude. What they imply. No mention of particular heresies: it is rather a revived paganism that is foretold. This confirmed by the Apocalypse. St. Paul's testimony examined. His description of God's dealings with the world given at the Areopagus. His description of the state of heathen nations in the Epistle to the Romans. If it be compared with his prophecy as to the latter days in the Second Epistle to Timothy, it will be found to correspond exactly, with very little exception. There were three elements in the heathen world: one good, which came from God; one human and corrupt, the work of man; and the third, Satanic. The gods of the heathen were devils. Proof of this from the corruption and cruelty of their religious rites. This last part was destroyed by the manifestation of Jesus Christ; but the human part of paganism, founded on the corruption of society and individual men by passion, has not been destroyed.

II. This modern heathenism is all around us. It has gained strength from the conquests of humanity, the progress of sciences, discoveries, and the like. The maxims of public and private life now prevalent are in a great measure heathen, and not Christian. Naturalism of our time.

CONCLUSION.—All these dangers are provided for in the Church, which will have to put forth her utmost resources in her last struggle with unregenerate nature. Importance of the school and the family to the Church. Her enemies always attack these points. We may soon be engaged in a struggle on at least one of them. Great need of activity in the cause of Christian education.

SERMON IV.

ALL THINGS MADE NEW.

Et audiui vocem magnam de throno dicentem: Ecce tabernaculum Dei cum hominibus, et habitabit cum eis. Et ipsi populus ejus erunt, et ipse Deus cum eis erit eorum Deus. Et absterget Deus omnem lacrymam ab oculis eorum, et mors ultra non erit, neque luctus, neque clamor, neque dolor erit ultra, quia prima abierunt. Et dixit Qui sedebat in throno: "Ecce, nova facio omnia."

And I heard a great voice from the Throne, saying, Behold the Tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself with them shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor sorrow, nor crying shall be any more, for the former things are passed away; and He that sat on the Throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." (Apoc. xxi. 3—5.)

INTRODUCTION.—The early Christians dwelt on the second coming of our Lord rather as the beginning of the new state of things than as the end of the present world. Usefulness of combining the two thoughts.

I. Certain rules as to the explanation of unfulfilled prophecy. The dates of future events not to be fixed with precision. The order of the several events which are made the subject of a great prediction not certain. The same thing is often foretold in different ways. Instances of this uncertainty: 1. The time at which the signs in the physical universe will take place, whether before or after the appearance of Antichrist; 2. The conflagration of the world, which must be understood as literally to be fulfilled, whether before the Day of Judgment or after. Other great features of the prophecy—the general resurrection, the coming of the Judge, the sentence, and the like.

II. We must select for consideration some thoughts in harmony with the season. Terrors of the Day of Judgment. Yet our Lord's coming is spoken of as a thing to be looked forward to with desire, hope, longing, and tranquil expectation by the Apostles. The elements of this joyous desire considered. Every portion of our life and existence is to have its new and glorious condition. 1. The glorification of the body. In our present state of being, any extraordinary spiritual favours to the soul are too much for the body, even in the Saints. Exception of our Lord and our Blessed Lady. In Heaven the beatitude of the soul will not overpower the body. We shall be like the Angels. St. Paul's words about the present and future state of our bodies. They will have a far higher condition than that which our parents enjoyed while innocent. They will be like our Lord's body at the Transfiguration and after the Resurrection. This is the Christian answer to the complaints made against the discipline of mortification of the natural appetites.—2. The renovation of the physical universe, according to the teaching of St. Paul. This, again, answers the complaints against the jealousy with which the Church guards against the dangers of the unregulated study of physical science.—3. The new state of companionship in Heaven.

CONCLUSION.—It is natural, in contemplating the details of these prophecies, that we should dwell rather on what shall abide for ever than on what shall pass away. The tribulations of the world, the coming of Antichrist, the great apostacy, the destruction of the earth, the Day of Judgment itself, will pass away, but the new condition of things which will then succeed will never change or cease.

SERMON I.

PROPHECIES OF THE END OF THE WORLD.*

Maria autem conservabat omnia verba hæc, conferens in corde suo.

But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.

(Words taken from the 19th verse of the 2nd chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.)

I PURPOSE, my brethren in Jesus Christ, during the Sundays of this month, to put before you a few considerations with regard to the chief circumstances revealed to us in Holy Scripture and in the tradition of the Church relating to that great future mystery to which our attention is providentially directed at this holy season. The Church at this time is training us to prepare ourselves more particularly to celebrate with joy and thankfulness the great Feast of Christmas, the commemoration of our Lord's first coming into the world, in poverty, in suffering, in gentleness, in benignity and humility; but she is led by a heavenly instinct to do this, in great measure, by means of considerations concerning our Blessed Lord's future coming in glory, majesty, and power. These two thoughts seem, as it were, to require one another, each as the other's fitting and natural supplement. It seems as if from Bethlehem and Nazareth

* Preached in the Triduum of Preparation for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, on Sunday, Dec. 6th.

we were to be continually looking on to the end of all things, and reminding ourselves that that sweet and gentle Child, around Whose opening days are clustered so many tender thoughts of thankfulness and hopefulness and love, is to come hereafter terrible to His enemies, a fire going before His face, Heaven and earth rolling up like a scroll before Him, "with the voice of an Archangel and the trumpet of God" * calling on the dead to arise and come to judgment. It seems as if, on the other hand, we were not to look forward to the great and terrible day of the manifestation of the Son of Man as our Judge, without remembering that it is our own blessed and most loving Jesus Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem, the Boy of Nazareth, He Who drew all hearts around Him in Galilee, Who is to sit on that great white throne, and call His people before Him. And again, the Mother is put before us as well as the Son. As if to carry out still further the blending of the two advents, Providence has arranged that just at this time we should be called on to keep the great Feast of our Lady's Immaculate Conception, and to be helped by the thought of that perfect sinlessness and purity which alone in all the world was worthy to receive Jesus Christ when He came, to prepare ourselves to stand before the tribunal of her Son, the Lamb of God, the Judge of all the Earth.

And therefore, my brethren, let us begin our consideration of these awful subjects by placing ourselves under her special protection and patronage. It has been the lot of this great subject of our

* 1 Thess. iv. 15.

Lord's second coming, that it has been inquired into and thought about in two different ways. The prophecies, direct and indirect, concerning it, which are to be found from one end of Scripture to the other, are very numerous, and in some cases very minute, and even intricate in detail. In consequence, they invite from those who are not animated by great reverence and diffidence in their own discernment, what must be called a presumptuous and intrusive method of treatment. We find men who are not guided by the analogy of the faith and the instincts of the Church, drawing out schemes of what is to happen before the end of the world, and fixing the precise year of that event of which our Lord said, "Of that day and hour no one knoweth, no, not the Angels of God, but the Father alone."* They tell us when this or that is to come about, and the end of all things is to take place. This is not either reasonable or Catholic—not reasonable, for no prophecy can be expected to be read in all its details beforehand, and, as a matter of fact, some of these interpreters are foolish enough to fix such dates as fall within their own lifetime, and thus are themselves enabled to prove their own folly. It is un-Catholic, because, although the Church has always set her face steadily to the contemplation of the future, although she knows well the blessing that is to be gained by the devout study of God's warning notes, still it is her spirit to confine herself in her explanations to certain great outlines, certain prominent and distinguishing facts, which are marked

* St. Matt. xxiv. 36.

unmistakeably on the pages of Scripture, and, for the times and seasons, she leaves these in the obscurity in which the same Scripture has veiled them. And, my brethren, we shall have enough to do for all practical purposes if we can define these few most prominent features of the latter days, which shall precede the coming of the Son of Man; and we shall consider them best if we pray our Blessed Lady to obtain for us a share of that humble, reverential, thoughtful, and tranquil spirit, which was her own characteristic when she studied the Holy Scriptures before the Incarnation, and when she kept on considering mystery after mystery of the Incarnation as it came about, comparing one portion and feature of God's wonderful dealings with another; that characteristic tone of mind which made the holy Evangelist, who so seldom leaves his simple narrative to speak of the qualities of persons, to write of her more than once, "Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart!"

I. When we read in the pages of Holy Scripture the several prophecies which relate to the coming, or the comings, of our Blessed Lord, we are struck by a fact quite in harmony with what I have remarked on as to the close union between the two events in the mind of the Church. Not only is the second coming of our Lord to judge the world, the article which we profess every time we recite the *Credo*, spoken of from one end of Scripture to the other, so that we may almost say, that there is no one thing so constantly foretold and dwelt on as the last end of all things; but also, when Prophets

are speaking of the first coming of our Lord, of His advent in gentleness, in love, in meekness, in humility, and in poverty—when He would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, when He would have nothing to do with judgment, and would not condemn even the poor woman who had been taken in adultery—I say, when they speak of our Lord's first coming, they seem unable to restrain themselves from adding particulars which belong to His second advent in power, majesty, and wrath. The famous passage in Malachias the Prophet,* is a case of this kind. We know that it refers to our Lord's first coming, because it is a part of the prophecy about His precursor at that time, St. John the Baptist. And yet when the Prophet has spoken of our Lord's coming, "The Lord Whom ye seek, and the Angel of the Covenant Whom ye desire, shall come to His temple," he breaks out, "Who shall be able to think of the day of His coming, and who shall stand to see Him? for He is like a refining fire, and like the fuller's herb." And it was just the same with St. John the Baptist himself. When he spoke to the Jews about our Lord's coming so immediately after him, his words were full of the future judgment. "The axe is laid to the root of the tree," he says; "Every tree that doth not yield good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire;" "His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His floor, and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."† It is as if the light of the fires of the great judgment day made

* Mal. iii. 6.

† St. Matt. iii. 10, 12.

everything else pale and faint in comparison to the eyes of those who saw into the future of God's doings with the world; as if the figure of Jesus Christ coming in the clouds of Heaven, with all His holy Angels, to judge mankind, was so grand and fearful as to draw to itself their gaze from everything else, even from the prodigies of love of Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Calvary.

We may remark also, my brethren, that as the second coming of Christ was so frequently in the mouths of His Prophets, so also was it spoken of frequently by Himself and by His Apostles, and this at the most solemn and critical times of all His and their ministry on earth. Thus, when He closed His public preaching on one of the days of Holy Week, and sat down on the way to Bethany, to look for the last time, as it was to be, on the Temple and City which He had done so much to save, He uttered His great prophecy about their destruction, but in such a way as to blend and mingle with the description of their destruction that of the signs of His own coming, and of the end of the world.* Again, at the very moment of His condemnation, when Caiaphas adjured Him by the living God to say whether He were the Christ or not, our Lord at once spoke of the day of judgment. He was as a lamb before His shearers, dumb, not opening His mouth, till this adjuration came to force Him to speak, alone, forsaken, betrayed, reviled, slandered by false witnesses, denied by His Apostle, ill-treated even at the very tribunal of justice, and yet He calmly said the words, "Thou

* St. Matt. xxiv.

hast said it. Nevertheless I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of Heaven."*

So it is all through the New Testament history. When the Apostles are looking up after their ascended Lord, they are reminded of this by the Angels—"Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to Heaven? this Jesus Who is taken up from you into Heaven shall so come as you have seen Him going into Heaven."† And when St. Peter first opened the course of Apostolic preaching on the day of Pentecost, he spoke of the second coming of our Lord; when he wrought the first Apostolical miracle, he spoke of the second coming of our Lord; when he received the first of the Gentiles, Cornelius, into the Church, he spoke of our Lord as appointed to judge the world.‡ In the same way, when the Apostles bore testimony to Jesus Christ even before the heathen, who knew nothing of the Old Testament, they preached the doctrine of the judgment. St. Paul, when he spoke to the philosophers of Athens about the unknown God, told them that He Whom they ignorantly worshipped had appointed a day to judge the world by the Man whom He had appointed; and when the Roman Governor sent for him to hear him discourse, he spoke of the judgment to come.|| For, as the same Apostle shows us in his argument to the Romans, this truth about the future judgment is one which has its witness in every human conscience,

* St. Matt. xxvi. 64.

‡ Acts ii. 19, 20; iii. 20, 21; x. 42.

† Acts i. 11.

|| *Ibid.* xvii. 31; xxiv. 25.

and cannot be quite obliterated, either by the presumptuousness of infidelity or by the corruptions of superstition. St. Paul speaks of the Gentiles as showing the works of the law written in their hearts, "their consciences bearing witness to them, and their thoughts between themselves accusing or else defending one another;" and then he speaks of the day in which God "will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel."* For man knows that he is free, and that freedom implies responsibility, and an account to be given to his Maker; and he bears within himself an unsleeping judge, the voice of his conscience, which may be disobeyed but will not be silenced, which always speaks with authority, and appeals in every heart, Jewish, Christian, or Gentile, civilised or barbarian, Pagan or Atheist, to a judgment to come, which shall confirm its sentence and vindicate its right. To this simple truth St. Paul confidently appealed, as I have said, before the philosophic idlers of Athens, and again, a few years later, when the Roman Governor Felix had him in his keeping, and was willing to listen to his words, he "treated of justice and chastity and of the judgment to come," so that "Felix was terrified," and his evil conscience would not allow him to hearken to the Apostle any longer.

This truth, moreover, which found its echo even in the minds and hearts of the heathen, was a part also of the elementary teaching imparted by the Apostles to their converts. They were all trained, as St. Paul words it to the Thessalonians, who had at that time

* Romans ii. 15, 16.

been but a few weeks in the light of the Christian faith, "to wait for God's Son from Heaven, Jesus, Whom He raised up from the dead;"* and so entirely did the great truth of His coming fill their minds, that they had to be warned by the Apostle who had taught it them not to expect it too soon. For to them, my brethren, as it would seem, there was but little thought of the long future of the Church upon earth—no picture of hope and expectation of so marvellous a history as that on which we now look back over the length of so many centuries, of the conquest of the world, of the leavening of society, of the triumph of Christian civilisation and philosophy, of the unravelling of the mysteries of nature and the subjugation of the physical elements to the uses of man under the guidance of the Church. Prophets had spoken of such glories, but these Christians dwelt rather on the great end and crown of all prophecy, which was to be the beginning of the new kingdom of God, the coming of the Son of Man in power. And so we find among them the clearest evidence of such an expectation as that against being engrossed by which St. Paul had afterwards to warn them,† that the second advent was immediately at hand. Our Lord had said, "The end is not yet,"‡ and still there was this expectation in the minds of the early Christians. Not in their minds only, my brethren, but in the minds of those who came after them in successive generations. I find the same expectation in St. Cyprian in the third century, in St. Chrysostom and St. Jerome in the fourth, St. Gregory the Great

* 1 Thess. i. 10. † 2 Thess. ii. ‡ St. Matt. xxiv. 6.

witnesses to it in the sixth, St. Bernard in the twelfth, St. Vincent Ferrer in the fourteenth and fifteenth—all were looking continually for the appearance of the Man of Sin, whose coming was to go before that of our Lord. In this, my brethren, how different, we may say, from the generality of men in our time! who seem, in their indifference and incredulity, to bring before us the fulfilment of the prophecy of St. Peter, and thereby most truly to indicate the actual drawing nigh of the end by their very forgetfulness of it: "In the last days there shall come deceitful scoffers, walking after their own lusts, saying, Where is His promise and His coming? for since the time that the fathers slept, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."* The Apostle seems to tell us, in these and the words which follow, that men will be led to this unbelief by their own confidence that they have ascertained the unchangeableness and absolute necessity of the laws of the physical universe, and that they will have put aside as an exploded tale the record of Scripture as to the great interference with those laws which has already taken place once in the history of the world by the Deluge. Yes, surely this temper of forgetfulness and self-confidence is an even more significant mark of the approaching end than the anxious expectation that our Lord was to come at once which prevailed among the early Christians and the Saints; and it explains also our Lord's prediction that He is to come at a time when He is not looked for. There are to be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the

* 2 St. Peter iii. 4.

stars ; the powers of the heavens, the very laws of the universe in which these men are to put so much trust, are to be shaken ; and yet, as it was in the days of Noe before the Flood, and in the days of Lot before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, so also shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man.*

II. But it is more profitable to us to enter into the thoughts of the early Christians and of the Saints than to explain the delusions of the men of the latter days. And as to the expectation of the Saints, we shall understand this better, my brethren, when we consider what belongs more properly to our subject, that is, what were those great features of the latter days to which the eyes of the Church have been directed from the very first. And to-day I shall sketch them very briefly, hoping to speak more at length of some one or two of them on future occasions. But we can see almost at once why it was that, at so early a period, and again later on, the disciples of the Apostles, and, indeed, the generality of Christians, were literally, as our Lord bade them be, like men waiting for Him. With them, the last time was not so much the end of the world, the close of the long conflict of the Church, the great day of account, as *the coming of the Lord*. Their eyes and hearts strained forward to see Him Whom some of them had seen and known, and Whom all had heard of and loved. Now, as to this, we are all on a level, because, to each one of us, the coming of our Lord, the end of the world, the day of account, is the day

* St. Luke xvii. 26—30.

of his own death. I do not mean to say that the particular judgment by which each man is judged at the moment at which he dies is the same as the judgment of which we are speaking, but that after the moment of death the world closes to us, with all its interests, all its events, and all its history, and we have no more to do with it until we are summoned to stand before our Lord at the day of judgment. Our part is played, the latter days are come to us, the Judge is at the door, we meet Him at our death.

But now observe further what, as I say, were the great features of the latter times, as drawn out in Scriptural prophecy. In the first place—I do not mean first in point of time, but most conspicuous—we may place the revelation, as St. Paul calls it, of the Man of Sin. Before the second coming of our Lord, that one great enemy of God, who is called in Scripture Antichrist, is to appear, and for a short time to reign and cause himself to be worshipped. When St. Paul warns the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord is not to come at once, he says it will not come “unless there come a revolt first, and the Man of Sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and is lifted up above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself as if he were God.”* Next Sunday I hope to explain what the Scripture tells us concerning him; for the present it is enough to have named him as one of the prominent figures in the prophecies of the latter days. And you may remember that both

* 2 Thess. ii. 4.

St. Paul and St. John, when they speak of him, do so rather by way of reminding those to whom they write of what they already knew than as instructing them afresh. St. Paul says: "*Remember you not*, when I was with you, that I told you of these things?" and St. John: "Little children, you *have heard* that Antichrist cometh."* And we may surely conclude that the Apostles had some good reason for teaching their converts at once concerning this servant of the Evil One—such a reason, for instance, as would be contained in the working in the world around them of that very spirit of antagonism to our Lord of which Antichrist is to be the fullest and most conspicuous embodiment.

In the next place, we may mention that great apostacy—as it would seem, from the Catholic Church—which St. Paul mentions under the name of the "revolt." Our Lord warns the Apostles and their followers against the extreme seductiveness of evil,† and it seems to be clearly foretold that there shall be in the latter days a great falling off—altogether or for a time—of a great number from the Christian faith. In that same passage to the Thessalonians already quoted, St. Paul mentions this expressly further on, when he speaks of the success of the wicked one, "whose coming is according to the working of Satan, in all power and signs and lying wonders, and in all seduction of iniquity to them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. Therefore shall God send them the operation of error to

* 1 John ii. 18.

† St. Matt. xxiv. 5, 24.

believe lying.”* Of this apostacy, too, I shall speak hereafter, and so I pass on from it now.

Then, in the third place, there is mention made of a certain power existing in the world, which, for the present, hinders the manifestation of Antichrist, and which is to be taken away and overcome by him. We find this again in St. Paul—“And now you know what withholdeth, that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity already worketh, only that he who now holdeth do hold, until he be taken out of the way.”† And, my brethren, this I will not leave for future treatment, but pause for a moment to explain what it means, according to the most received interpretation of the Fathers and Catholic commentators. Antichrist, then, we are told, is peculiarly and specially the lawless one, who shall trample under foot all laws, human as well as divine. The apostacy of the latter days will worship him as a god, and will follow his example and spirit in all manner of lawlessness. On the other hand, the power in the world which hinders and prevents his full manifestation, is said by the Fathers to mean the temporal government of the Roman empire, or rather, as we should put it now, the principle which in those days was embodied and represented by that Government, the principle of law and order and right and obedience, the rule of conscience and of the natural law, as represented in the fabric of human society, which cannot stand for a moment without this principle of law and order and power and justice, to hold it together and to support it. Now, by this it seems to be meant that, as faith is

* 2 Thess. ii. 9, 10. † 2 Thess. ii. 6, 7, 11.

founded on reason, and grace built upon nature, so the supernatural society of the Church pre-supposes, and thus in a certain sense rests upon, the civil society ; and if any power of evil can utterly subvert and undermine the latter, it will go far towards obtaining a momentary victory over the former. This power, then, as it seems, kept and keeps back the full manifestation of Antichrist, and when it is taken out of the way he will appear.

And, once more, we may place, as the fourth great feature in the prophecy of which we are speaking, the strange fact to which I have already alluded, that, on the one hand, God shall warn mankind concerning the coming of the judgment in the most marked manner, by signs in the sun and moon and stars, by earthquakes, by incursions of the ocean—by “the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves,”* and that, on the other, these warnings shall pass unheeded by the great mass of men. And there shall also be other signs, not in the physical universe, but on the face of society, marking, by new and wonderful events, the history of mankind, the chief of which we may consider to be the blossoming of the barren fig-tree, according to the mystical meaning attached to that prediction by ancient writers. The blossoming of the fig-tree is the conversion of the Jewish nation to the faith of Christ by the preaching of Enoch and Elias. “From the fig-tree learn ye a parable,” said our Lord to His Apostles, who had seen him shortly before curse and wither the fig-tree close to the spot where they were sitting ; “when the

* St. Luke xvi. 28.

branch thereof is now tender, and the leaves come forth, you know that summer is nigh."* And St. Paul, speaking of his own nation, reprobate for a time from Christ, says: "If the loss of them be the reconciliation of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?"†

And now, my brethren, I say that the mere enumeration of these chief features in the prophetic vision of the days before our Lord's second coming goes far to explain how it was, and how it always must be, that God's watchful servants seemed and seem to find themselves in the presence of these signs, and to see the light of the coming of Christ breaking through the clouds. It is because these elements of the prophecy are the embodiment of principles and movements which have been at work in the world from the beginning, and which will only work more powerfully, more conspicuously, more successfully, at the end. As to Antichrist, you know what St. John says—"Children, you have heard that Antichrist cometh, and even now there are become many Antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last hour."‡ And he goes on to speak of the heretics and false teachers of his own time. And as even in St. John's time there were many Antichrists—forerunners, and foreshadowers of the great Man of Sin, the enemy of God—so the keen and true instincts of the Church have always felt the working against her of the spirit of Antichrist, the temper of disobedience, heresy, schism, falsehood, deception; and from time to time there have arisen conspicuous instances, men who

* St. Matt. xxiv. 32. † Rom. xi. 15. ‡ St. John ii. 18.

have had so bad and baneful a pre-eminence over their fellows in the evil work of oppressing the Church, persecuting the faith, opposing the Holy See, and corrupting Christian doctrine and Christian manners—men like Julian, or Mahomet, or Luther, or some of the tyrannical Emperors—as almost to seem to fulfil in their character and history the personal conditions of Antichrist himself. And so, again, as to the apostacy of the latter days. This too has always had its forerunners and its anticipations. The whole history of the Christian centuries is marred by the stains of certain great apostacies, more or less complete, from the Catholic faith and from the unity of the Church. There were apostacies in St. John's own time, of the heretics who denied Christ; then there were the apostacies of Arius and of Nestorius, then the complete apostacy of Mahomet, the departure of the Oriental Churches from unity, the fall in the sixteenth century of a great part of northern Europe from Catholicism. In our own day there are apostacies almost without number, new religions professing either to improve upon the religion of Christ, or to supersede it, or to deny it altogether and leave nothing in its place; nor in our own time, nor in the times of the early apostacies, have there been wanting dealings with Satan, lying wonders, or the professors of mysterious intercourse with the other world, capable enough, as St. Paul says, of deceiving those who do "not love the truth to believe it."

And so, also, with regard to that other great lever of evil, the attack on the principles and foundations of social life and civil society, which is to be at last,

in the days of Antichrist, successful in overthrowing it and casting it out of the way—this also has always had its anticipation in every age. The mystery of evil, working towards the destruction of the human race, has always been active. Even before the fall of Jerusalem the empire was so convulsed by civil wars and the claims of rival candidates to the throne, that men might need the warning that “the end was not at once;” and then again, later on, the whole Roman civilisation and the fabric of the world-wide empire seemed to be tottering to destruction under the blows of the northern barbarians. Who could then have foreseen how the Church would tame the savage conquerors of Europe, and raise up out of the ruins of the world the new civilisation and the new fabric of Christendom, to supply, and far more than supply, the place of the empire, to be the refuge and home of the principles on which the stability of society rests, and which again, in our own days more than ever before, is made the mark of the fiercest attacks of the agents of the Evil One, who now all but openly proclaim that their object is as much to destroy social order and right as it is to subvert the Church of God? And if you will turn to the acts of him who of all men has the surest instinct as to the evils of our time, because he is the successor of St. Peter, *Fidelis servus et prudens, quem constituit Dominus super familiam suam ut det illis cibum in tempore*—if you calmly and, as I may say, with the eye of an historian, look to what the Church has specially lifted her voice to speak about by means of the Holy Pontiff in this day, you find much indeed about

sacred dogmas, much about ecclesiastical right, much about the privileges of the Church as invaded by the secular power; but, not less than all these, you will find that Pius IX. has had to warn the world as to things which are the very foundation of Christian and even of natural society, the sanctity of marriage, the parental right of education, even the natural right of law and property and justice, which the secret sectarians of our own times are doing their best to undermine. And if in a year's time we are to see, what has not been seen for so many centuries, the Bishops of the Catholic Church assembled in a General Council around the Vicar of Jesus Christ, it is not only and not entirely for the needs of the Church and of religion as such, but for the needs of human society and civil order, the very foundations of which are being sapped by the enemies both of God and man.

These three things then, the persecution of the Church by the spirit of Antichrist, the seduction and apostacy of many by means of the delusions of evil, and the subverting of human society by the instruments of Satan, are, indeed, particularly marks of the latter days, but they are also marks of all days that have been since the beginning of the Church. And therefore the true sons of the Church, those who have her instinct and her spirit of watchfulness against the common danger, have ever been ready to utter loud notes of warning to the men of their generation, that Antichrist was at hand, and that the end of all things was approaching; and, as St. John says, "because there are many Anti-

christ's," and because there is much apostacy, and because there is much plotting against the very foundations of society, "therefore we know that it is the last hour." And so, my brethren, though we know not whether in our times, or a century hence, or ten centuries hence, the end of the world may come, we know, as the earliest Christians knew and divined so well, our duties and our true wisdom. The mystery of iniquity is all around us, and, besides, men are turning away their eyes and trying to persuade themselves that the world is so uniform that it had no beginning, and that its laws are so stable that it can have no end. But whether the days in which we live be the latter days or no, it is our business, first of all, to fit ourselves to meet our Lord, Who will come to each one of us "as a thief in the night," not unprepared for, as we hope, but suddenly at last, as we know. And beyond this, it is our duty to fight for our Lord's cause in the world, to throw all our little weight into the scale against the powers of evil—against the spirit of heresy, schism, lawlessness, sensuality, disregard of all sanctions and obligations, human and divine, which is in the air all around us, and which breathes destruction to the Church and to that Christian society which the Church has founded and sustained. "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching. Amen, I say to you, He will gird Himself and make them sit down to meat, and passing He will minister unto them. And if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants!"*

* St. Luke xii. 37, 38.

SERMON II.

THE MAN OF SIN.

Veni in nomine Patris Mei, et non accipitis Me; si alius venerit in nomine suo, illum accipietis.

I am come in the name of My Father, and you receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive.

(Words taken from the 43rd verse of the 5th chapter of St. John's Gospel.)

IN these words, addressed by our Blessed Lord to the Jews of Jerusalem, we are taught by some of the Fathers that He meant to foretell the future reception of Antichrist by that people which had rejected Himself. The other who is to come, not in the name of the Father, not in the name of any God but himself—"in his own name"—is the great enemy, the Man of Sin, the child of perdition, of whom St. Paul speaks in his Epistles. It is thought by Catholic and ancient writers that he will be Jewish by origin; at all events it seems probable that he will connect himself with the Jews and be received by them for a time before their final conversion, that he will build his false religion in some measure on Judaism, and that he will for a short time reign at Jerusalem, and make himself an object of worship at the Temple.

However this may be—for here we are touching on some details of the prophecies as to which we have no absolutely certain information to guide us—

we cannot but recognise in this sad prediction of our Lord an allusion to a general law which constantly operates in the providential course of human events. Our Lord is characterised in the Gospels as coming to His own, and not being received by them. You know how often He speaks of Himself and His Father as inviting, calling, beseeching people to come to the banquet or the kingdom which is prepared for them. Men reject God, and turn away from His offers and invitation with disdain. "I pray thee hold me excused," is their most courteous reply; at other times they turn upon His servants and messengers, beat them, handle them roughly, and slay them. And then comes in this law of retribution which is so observable in the providential government of the world. Those who refuse God are not able to refuse His and their own enemy. If they reject God's light service and loving invitation, they bring upon themselves the yoke of a hard master, and the burthen of a hungry slavery instead. The prodigal son had to become a servant and a swineherd in a far country, because he could not bear his happy dependence on his father in his own home. St. Paul tells us that the heathen were punished for their ingratitude to God by being allowed to fall into idolatry and degrade their moral nature in the hideous and nameless filthiness of paganism. We see the same law obtaining in the case of nations or persons, who emancipate themselves from the control of conscience to become the slaves of sin, who cast off the happy constraints of the Catholic faith to fall into endless delusions and fantastical forms of heretical error, or who cast aside

the bond of Catholic unity because they think the rule of Christ's Vicar too severe, only to find themselves bound hand and foot, gagged, in chains and in darkness, the prisoners of the civil power, whose aid they have invoked to free them from Rome. But of all instances of the working of this law, none will be more striking and more wonderful than that of which our Saviour here speaks; when those who have rejected Him, the blessed, the merciful, the gentle and humble, the very incarnation of the sweetness and tenderness of God's ineffable love, shall give themselves up body and soul into the power of the Antichrist, to be the willing slaves and eager worshippers of one who will be the most detestably diabolical of all those servants of Satan that have ever been let loose on the world to punish it for its neglect of God.

I. The prophecies in Holy Scripture which, with more or less of certainty, may be referred to the subject of the great enemy of God, the Man of Sin, are very numerous, and widely scattered over the several parts of the sacred volume. We may say that his figure is to be found at the source of the sacred stream of divine prediction, where the enmities placed by God between the woman and her seed on the one hand, and the serpent and his seed on the other, are spoken of, and where it is said of the serpent, *Tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus*—"Thou shalt lie in wait against her heel."* I say, if we compare this prophecy with part of the Apocalyptic vision of St. John, we seem to see in it a distinct forecasting of the future Antichrist.† Then again, we may observe that in a

* Gen. iii. 15.

† Apoc. xii.

passage in which the Prophet Ezechiel seems to speak of Antichrist, he uses words which appear to show that this same Antichrist was a familiar subject to the Prophets before him. "Thou then art he," he says, "of whom I have spoken in the days of old by My servants the Prophets of Israel, who prophesied in the days of those times that I would bring thee upon them."* Then again, we find him filling a large space in the prophecies of Daniel,† he is to be found in our Lord's words concerning the latter days, he is conspicuous in the passage of St. Paul which I quoted to you last Sunday, and we seem to feel his presence when St. Peter, St. Jude, and St. John, in their Epistles,‡ dwell on the evil times that were to come at the end of the world. Lastly, as so much of Daniel's prophecy relates to him, so also do large portions of the Apocalypse of the Beloved Disciple,|| who uses, concerning him and the events connected with him, language and imagery borrowed from the Prophets of the Old Testament, whose predictions he thus tacitly applies and fills up. Here then, my brethren, I have at once said enough to excuse myself from going in detail through the whole of this chain of prophecies, and, if the short time at our disposal did not preclude me from attempting it, I should still shrink from the task, because these predictions are in many parts, as we might naturally expect them to be, difficult and of doubtful interpretation. The great enemy of God of whom we are speaking is to have,

* Ezech. xxxviii. 17.

† Dan. vii. 8, 20; xi. xii.

‡ St. Peter, 2 Epist. iii.; St. Jude, 4—18; St. John, 1 Epist. ii.

|| Apoc. xiii.

and has already had, many types, many anticipations, many forerunners in history, just as the last great persecution of the Church has had so many preludes and foreshadowings. Many of these forerunners of Antichrist, many of these anticipations of his time and of his work in history, have been themselves the subjects of prophecy, and thus we may frequently be mistaking for predictions of him passages which refer more immediately to them. It is enough for us then, if we can put forward such general outlines of his history, and such prominent features of his character, as seem to stand out unmistakeably from the sacred pages in which Daniel, St. John, and St. Paul appear evidently to speak of Antichrist, and thus to give ourselves clear and distinct ideas of the great evil which in course of time is to come upon the world.

In the first place, then, my brethren, it is hardly needful to say that Antichrist is to be one particular person, a child born of a woman. I say it is hardly needful to point out how utterly foolish, as well as how untrue, must such an interpretation be as that which would explain the prophecies concerning him as if they related to a power, a principle, a system, and, above all, to a chain and succession of persons reaching from the earliest ages of the Church to the latest, such as is that once common Protestant figment, that Antichrist in prophecy was a personification of the power of the Holy See, and of the Pontiffs who have succeeded St. Peter. Antichrist could not come at the end of the world, and have a particular history, as we shall see, and a short

and strongly-marked career, if he were merely the symbol of a line which began with Christianity itself and has endured ever since. Again, we are taught by Christian writers to put aside another wild notion, that Satan, or one of his evil angels, is to become actually incarnate, in imitation of the Incarnation of our Blessed Lord, and that thus the great enemy of the faith will be a demon in human form or nature. Satan is allowed much, but he will never be allowed so closely to imitate the blessed mystery of our Redemption, the greatest work of God, the union of two natures in one Person. No, Antichrist will be a man like other men, a child like other children; he will be borne in the womb, and suckled at the breasts of a woman, a daughter of Eve, and, moreover, he will have all the blessings granted to him, and all the prospects offered to him, which are the common heritage of the children of our race. A Guardian Angel will watch over him from the first, Saints will pray for him, he will have the door of the Church open to him as to others, the fatherly care of God will not neglect him in the ordinary course of providence, the tender and winning grace which is sufficient to enable him to do right and practise virtue, to imitate Christ and save his soul, will not be denied to him. But we are told by the Fathers that he will at an early age fall under the corrupting power of the devil, and we see too much of the intense activity of the emissaries and tools of the Evil One to pollute and pervert Christian children even in their tenderest years, we are too much occupied in daily conflict, even in Christian

countries, to maintain for the Church and for the parent the right of Christian education for their offspring, to see anything incredible in what we are taught will be the future of that unhappy child who is to grow into the enemy of God. He is to begin in obscurity, and to rise from a contemptible rank; but in a short time he will obtain a kingly station, and find himself in the possession of immense wealth and influence. God will have given him wonderful natural abilities, and his character will impose on and fascinate all who come within his reach. After a rapid series of victories of unexampled brilliancy, Antichrist will be for the time the master of the world.

The character of this miserable man is drawn out for us from the Scriptures by the Fathers and Christian writers,* and there is but little in it that has not been frequently foreshadowed by those who have been his types and precursors. Pride, cruelty, ambition, artifice, are among its leading features; and to these we may safely add, as a matter of course, extreme voluptuousness and licentiousness of manners.† What is more peculiar to him is that he will be the author of a religion of his own. A great part of this will consist in the denial of the truth, and in insolence against God; but he will not only formally teach impiety and infidelity, and "speak great words against the High One," and deny "the God of his fathers,"‡ but he will specifically teach

* The reader will find the authorities here referred to in Suarez' *De Incarnatione*, p. 2, disp. 54, and in Roberti's *Lezioni Sacre sopra la Fine del Mondo*, l. 4 and 5.

† Dan. xi. 37.

‡ *Ibid*, vii. 8, 25; xi. 36, 37.

that he himself, and not our Lord Jesus Christ, is the true Messiah, and he will set himself forth in the restored Temple of Jerusalem as the object of worship, as the only true God.* Here there are some lines in the prophetic description which seem to us as yet obscure and confused, because our eyes are not yet keen enough to see the harmony of statements, different though not conflicting—for we hear something of his making a god of his own to be worshipped,† and something also of a kind of restoration of paganism,‡ of which he will be the author. It is certain, however, that he will have the command of all the power of Satan for the purpose of working false and illusive miracles in confirmation of his teaching, among which will be that he will call down fire from heaven, and have the power to make an image of his false god to speak.||

Once more. Antichrist will be a great persecutor of the Church; a persecutor in cruelty, and in refinement of malice, and, as it would seem, in success, surpassing all those who have hitherto played that fatal part in the history of the Church. He will “make war with the Saints and overcome”§—not indeed the Church, which is immortal and indefectible, but large numbers of her weaker children. He is to reign in his seductions “over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation.”¶ We are specially told that he will do what has already been done by former persecutors, and notably in the

* 2 Thess. ii. 4.

† Dan. xi. 38.

‡ Apoc. xiii. 3, 14, 15.

|| Apoc. xiii. 13, 15.

§ *Ibid.* 7.

¶ *Ibid.*

countries in which we live—he will proscribe and forbid the celebration of the Adorable Sacrifice of the Mass, the great act of worship of the Church.* Moreover, he will impose by law the worship of his own false religion; and in this, again, he has been anticipated by his forerunners. “Whosoever will not adore the image of the beast shall be slain.”† Again, we find foretold of him a species of cunning legal persecution, by no means incredible when we remember what the devices are which have at various times been adopted by the enemies of our holy religion, and what is the inquisitive nature of modern legislation. It appears that he will in some way exact an impious homage to himself, as a condition to be complied with by every one who would mix in the ordinary business of life, in traffic, commerce, and the like, so that no one is to buy or sell except they have his mark on their right hand or on their forehead.‡ All this points to a skilful warfare against souls, combined with, and a refinement upon, the old brutal cruelty of heathen or Protestant persecutors—a warfare which no doubt will be represented as a necessary condition for the security of government, as a just right of the State. Lastly, we are told that God will send special messengers and ministers of His Word, beside the ordinary Hierarchy and ministers of the Church, to oppose this great enemy of the truth. You may remember how it stands recorded in different parts of the Scripture that two great servants of God have as yet not paid the common debt of mortality, but are preserved in some wonderful way,

* Dan. xii. 11. † Apoc. xiii. 15. ‡ *Ibid.* 16, 17.

as has always been thought among Christians, to re-appear at the end of the world, and then to die for the truth. From the Patriarchs before the Flood Enoch was taken, and from the Prophets in the days of the Jewish dispensation Elias was taken; and these two, as the tradition of the Church tells us, are to come and preach and work miracles, and, as it would seem, to convert at least a great part of the Jewish nation to God before the last day.* They are to oppose Antichrist, and at last are to be slain by him; and then, in the moment of his triumph, at the height of his power, when all the earth seems silent before him, the enemy of God will be destroyed by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as St. Paul tells the Thessalonians—"Whom the Lord Jesus shall kill with the spirit of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming."†

And now, my brethren, I suppose, when we look forward to these coming events in the history of the human race, our first view of them represents them to us as something perfectly novel and unheard of before, and we are inclined to suppose that all the conditions of society and the whole character of the world's history must be radically changed before such things can take place. What! is a man to make himself worshipped in the temple of God? Is heathenism again to rise? Is the human race, after all its moral and material achievements, to grovel once more in idolatry, falsehood, and superstition? Now, I do not deny that there are many features in the character and in the proceedings of this great

* Apoc. xi. 3—7.

† 2 Thess. ii. 8.

enemy of Jesus Christ which will be unexampled, at least in greatness and intensity, in all that may have gone before. We are told that Satan will then be "let loose;"* he has always by nature an immense power to hurt and to deceive the world, but he is permitted by God to exercise this power just as far as God sees fit, and there is a greater or less degree in this permission at various times. At the end of the world, when he makes what will be his last effort, God will permit him a greater amount of power, for the punishment of mankind who have treated the Gospel so ungratefully. This is true. In the latter days the power of evil will be in this sense increased, and the malice of the Evil One will be intensified, because, as St. John says, he knows that "he hath but a short time."†

And yet we may go a great deal too far in allowing that there will be an altogether new state of things in the days of Antichrist. It is a pernicious delusion as to the ancient history of man, as it is recorded in Scripture, to suppose that the persons and the events, the principles and the motives, which come into prominence in the sacred pages, were entirely different from those with which we are familiar. I say it is a mischievous delusion, because it leads us to feel as if we had nothing practically to do with the sacred history, and thus we are prevented from realising that the same things may happen in our day as happened then, that God is just as active in the guidance of human affairs, and in the notice which He takes of human crimes, as

* Apoc. xx. 7.

† Apoc. xii. 12.

He was of old. And so I say, rather, that the days of Antichrist are to be the natural issue and outcome and fruit and development of the days in which we live, and that the elements and principles which are to be at work then in their greatest force are at this moment working around us. As to Antichrist himself, he will be a man of his own day, the legitimate child and offspring of the generation to which he belongs, gathering up in his own person and character its chief features and essential notes. To us, as he is described in the pages of Scripture, he is the enemy of God, the Man of Sin, the child of perdition, the persecutor of the Saints, the worker of lying wonders, the slave of Satan, the author and propagator of a false religion, the tyrannical proscriber of every worship but his own. To us he is, as he will be in reality, a man of blood, a soul stained with the deepest sin, given up to corruption, fearfully degraded, full of falsehood, vanity, impurity, cruelty, a soul in which evil has been carried to its highest pitch, as little mixed as it is possible to be in this world with the faintest shade of good ; excluding, as far as may be, not only virtue and moral excellence, but even anything that can attract sympathy or admiration.

But Antichrist will not wear this aspect to the men of his day. Nay, I may venture to say still more—that, were he to come now, he would not look like this. No, my brethren, the world and the Church are always at war, and on each side there are heroes, great men, men who express the ideas and attract the sympathy and devotion of the side which they represent. At the head of the heroes

of the Church is the lovely and noble beauty of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God; at the head of the world's heroes, their fitting and proper leader, the natural object of their devotion, will be the enemy of Jesus, the Antichrist. Evil and sin in this world do that much of homage to conscience and to virtue, that they never proclaim themselves to be what they are, and always present themselves, as it were, under the colours of their adversaries. Every giant of wickedness here calls himself the advocate of right and justice, every monstrous deed of public and world-wide wrong is done under the name of some watchword of goodness or of truth. It is liberty, or freedom, or enlightenment, or progress, or fraternity, that is inscribed on every banner that marshals behind it the hosts of evil. Words like these will be in the mouths of those who form the herd of the flatterers of Antichrist, who are the executors of his behests and the preachers of his doctrine. Men will talk then, as they talk now, of a great deliverance from the bondage under which religion has so long kept down the intellect and restrained the free exercise of the instincts of human nature. We shall hear of the emancipation of thought, the banishment of superstition, the breaking to pieces of the old fetters, the removal of old lines of distinction, the exploding of old fables about God, and judgment, and eternal punishment; about a nature infected with sin, and under sentence of degradation, a nature in need, forsooth, of a saviour and a deliverer, in need, forsooth, of grace from God to enable it to do right, a nature whose nobility lay

in its being subdued, and whose highest perfection consisted in self-sacrifice and mortification! Humanity, it will be said then, has been groaning for centuries under a despotism which has withered its brightest flowers and poisoned its most enchanting pleasures by the old foolish chimeras of sin and responsibility and judgment hereafter; and the man who has revealed the glorious truth of the independence of nature will be hailed as the greatest of benefactors, and take his place, as it will be said, at the very summit of the historical grandeurs and glories of our race.

These things his admirers will say of Antichrist, as men like them may have said the same things of other conspicuous instruments of Satan and enemies of the truth, as it is in Jesus Christ, in ages before him. But the great fascination by which he will win the homage and submission of the men of his day, will be not only that he will give them an easy creed and persuade them that conscience is a bugbear and that the indulgence of their lowest passions is a right or a duty, but also the great and rapid and unexampled success which will mark his course. It will be permitted him to rise suddenly, and to be almost in a moment the victorious master of the world; and his brilliant abilities and irresistible march to the highest power will so dazzle the eyes of men that they will forget to examine the legitimacy of his claims or the soundness of his policy, the truth of his creed or the honesty and purity of his life. You know how often we hear it said that "nothing succeeds like success," how ready the men

of this world are to idolise prosperous adventurers, men who have made their own way, men who have left their mark on their age, even for evil, men who have gained the object of their ambition even at the cost of honour and truthfulness. You know what a fascination genius of the lowest kind, and success by the most unprincipled means, exercise over the bulk of men, and how often we are startled by some instance which reveals to us how little the standard of greatness which exists in the minds of the majority is in accordance with the character of our Lord, nay, how eagerly they will hail direct antagonism to Him. You may have read, my brethren, in the history of the last century, how that miserable man whose name has become famous as the patriarch and apostle of modern infidelity, the man who began, or at all events carried to its height, that system of calumniating and scoffing and sneering at Christianity which has so many followers still—though his contemporaries knew him, as we also know him from his biographies, to have been eaten up by meanness, petty spite, vanity, jealousy, avarice, insatiable pride, ostentation, and love of applause, so that his character appears to us to have nothing in it that any one could heartily admire or love in any way—yet how, at the very close of his long drawn-out life, when the hand of death was already creeping upon him, he had himself transported once more to Paris, and how he there became the object of universal homage and, it may almost be said, of worship. Worship, for no other reason so much as that he had been a brilliant forerunner of Antichrist in his doctrine, in laughing

at religion and encouraging men in infidelity! And then all ranks of that gay and thoughtless society, dancing, as it were, at that moment, its last fling over the half-wakened fires of the volcano beneath its feet, which was so soon to burst forth and engulf the revellers in destruction—all ranks, I grieve to say, from the partner of the throne of the successor of St. Louis down to the lowest hangers-on of the light literature and the theatres of the time—came or sent in succession to the ante-chamber of that dying infidel as if to burn incense before him.* Ah! my brethren, have there not been triumphs in our day, and not far from us, which might remind us well enough of that last miserable triumph of Voltaire? triumphs, in which men of blood and crime and the most barefaced villainy, men who have hardly condescended to veil their rapine and violence under the cloak of some colourable pretext, have been made the heroes of a cultivated and refined society that calls itself Christian, while their chief claim on the homage of their worshippers has really been this, that they have been great enemies and injurers of the Church and of the Holy See? What wonder then if we are led to think that Antichrist will be the idol of his day, when to the charm of being a great denier and assailant of the checks and restraints which God has placed upon the unbridled indulgence of natural appetites, he will add the fascination of success such as the world has never before seen, and when he will enforce his claims by the aid of lying wonders, and

* See Maynard's *Voltaire, sa Vie et ses Œuvres*, t. ii., p. 590. Voltaire died in 1778.

when—to add that last sad element of all—the men of his time, because they have resisted and hated the truth, will be handed over by the just judgment of God to a spirit of blindness and delusion, so as to believe a lie!

Yes, my brethren, the world is always ready for its Antichrist. Its principles, and motives, and manners of judging, its aims and desires and longings, are all such as will find themselves satisfied, encouraged, answered to, in him. On the other hand, there is this consolation for the children of the Church, for those who form their thoughts and minds, who regulate their judgments and their lives, on the pattern of Jesus Christ and of His Saints, that they have in their own hearts and consciences a light and an unction of the Holy Ghost which will enable them to withstand all the wiles and seductions of the Evil One, to see through all his false wonders and lying miracles, and to baffle his power, if it be so, even by death. Only, my brethren, let us not deceive ourselves by thinking that all this that we have been speaking of is a thing of the future, a matter of merely historical interest and excitement to ourselves. No, my brethren, whether the latter days fall now, or centuries hence, Antichrist, as we saw last Sunday, is in the world at present. We recognise the workings of Divine Providence in the events of our time, and we should think ourselves faithless if we did not see the finger of God both in what befalls the Church, and in what befalls ourselves. But we must recognise also the working of the enemies of God. There is another hand continually active all around us; and it

behoves us very much not to mistake it or to ignore it. We need that holy simplicity of the Saints, which always saw Satan behind the forms of his instruments, and called by their right name the machinations of the Evil One. In the days of St. Catharine of Sienna, there was a war against the Church at the head of which were many of the Church's own princes, and she, humble, meek, and charitable as she was, did not speak of these tools of evil as a party, or as representing an idea, or as advocating a policy or a mistaken principle, but in the plainest language she called them *devils*.^{*} Well, my brethren, the hand that is to guide Antichrist is always plotting against the Church and against society. Satan is always, generation after generation, preparing men to be his instruments in the final conflict, he is always undermining our holy faith, always blinding and misleading the world, ever and anon setting forth his chosen instruments and servants in the work of impiety, and teaching them to clothe and bear themselves in such guise as to attract the attention, the interest, the influence, the popularity, which will at last centre around Antichrist himself.

Let us then, dear brethren in Jesus Christ, take care, in the first place, never to bow down or do homage to the world's idols—to intellect, to power, to success, to wealth, to the achievements of dishonest policy, to the prosperous lying, the unblushing wickedness, the boastful injustice of our time. Let us stand on the old paths, and give honour where alone honour

^{*} *Dimoni incarnati*. S. Catar., Epist. xviii., t. 1; edit. Burclamacchi. Lucca, 1722.

is due, to humility, and purity, and meekness, and self-sacrifice, and charity, and zeal for the glory of God. Let us shrine in our heart of hearts, as the measure of all good, the object and centre of all love, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who has come to us in the name of His Father. And in the second place, let us be like men looking forwards rather than backwards, men waiting for, and looking out for their Lord—not so much counting up what those before us have done and suffered for the cause of God, as if, forsooth, the days of persecution and conflict were gone, never to return; as if henceforth we were to lead quiet and unruffled lives, enjoying our truce with the world, making the most of our position in society, eating, and drinking, and marrying, and giving in marriage, as in the days of Noe—like men who have hung up their fathers' armour in their halls, and sit round the fire telling tales of their prowess, and yet know not and think not themselves how to lift a hand in the fight in which their fathers bled. No, my brethren; the Church of God is now preparing herself for her last persecution, and she is preparing herself by nothing so much as by waging vigorous warfare now in our own days against the evil influences of the world, and in repelling its assaults upon her outworks, such as marriage and education, as well as upon her doctrines and upon her unity. The last persecution may come in your days, or in the days of your children, or in the days of your children's children; but your children and your children's children will be what you are, what your example and your teaching make them. If you are soldiers, watchful, self-denying, eager to beat

back and advance upon the enemies of your souls and of the Church—then, my brethren, you will have done a twofold good. You will have served the Church and God in your own day, and so have weakened the power of evil in all days, and you will have left behind you and handed on to your little ones the tradition of faithfulness, warfare, toil, and sacrifice for God. If you are soft, self-indulgent, worldly, indolent, careless of the dangers, and at peace with the evils, of our time, then, though Antichrist come not yet, you will have done a twofold evil which will descend in misery upon those who come after you. You will have weakened the cause of God in your own day, and so you will have made the future triumph of evil more easy and more complete; and you will have bequeathed to your children the traditions and the training which will but ill fit them to withstand in their own generation the wiles, the seductions, and the cruelties of the great enemy of Jesus Christ.

SERMON III.

THE GREAT APOSTACY.

Veruntamen Filius Hominis veniens, putas, inveniet fidem in terrâ ?

But yet the Son of Man when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth ?

(Words taken from the 8th verse of the 18th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.)

THESE words of sad foreboding were uttered by our Blessed Lord when he had been exhorting His disciples never to faint or grow weary in prayer. He told them how the unjust judge had avenged the poor widow's wrong, simply because, in her importunity, she gave him no peace till he did so. He feared not God, and did not regard man, yet he was forced by her continual prayer to do justice. "Hear what the unjust judge saith ; and will not God avenge His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He have patience in their regard ? I say to you that He will quickly revenge them. But yet the Son of Man, when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth ?" His Elect will cry to Him day and night, and He will certainly come quickly to avenge them. The persecution of Antichrist will be very severe, and his seductions very powerful, so as to lead astray, if it were possible, even the Elect. But, by the mercy of God, it is not possible. About this same time He said to the Jews, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them,

and they follow Me, and I give them life everlasting ; and they shall not perish for ever, and no man shall pluck them out of My hand. . . . No man can snatch them out of the hand of My Father."* And so we may venture to say, Yes, Lord, Thou shalt find faith upon earth, though it may not be the wide, the intense, the universal faith which Thy mercies and Thy love have deserved of us. There shall be wise virgins then, with oil in their lamps, good and faithful servants, whom their Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching ! But at the same time, my brethren, we must say, if we look to the account of the latter days which is given us generally in the writings of the Apostles, that there will have been great ruin and havoc made among Christians before our Lord cometh. There is to come the great apostacy—as it seems, a greater and more calamitous loss to the Church, for the moment, than the schism of the East, or the perversion of the North of Europe. This is our subject this afternoon, the last feature of the latter days that we need dwell upon in detail, before we pass on, next Sunday, to the consideration of the consummation and restoration of all things by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Before I proceed to count up what indications are given us of the falling off of the latter days, let me make one or two remarks on the manner in which we must interpret the words of the holy Apostles who seem to speak of this. In the first place, we must remember that, to the Apostles and the writers of the New Testament generally, the life of the

* St. John x., 27—29.

Church is one and continuous. With God, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Apostles and Prophets see the future, to some extent, in the view of God Himself, and they speak of the last days as imminent, and even present to the men of their own generation, for this reason, among others, that the same Church which existed in their days will have to meet the storms of that last outbreak of evil. St. Paul knew perfectly well that the days of Antichrist were far distant, and he even warned the Thessalonians not to think them close at hand ; and yet he seems to speak of those who are to be alive at the day of judgment as if he and those to whom he wrote might be among them. In the same way, while describing the many evils of the last ages of the Church, the Apostles spoke of the special forms in which the mystery of iniquity would work in the generation which was rising up around them as they themselves drew near to the end of their course. The same principles of evil with which we have to contend, and with which those after us will have to contend in different developments, were already sending forth those evil shoots which sprung up into the heresies of the first and second centuries ; heresies to which the men of our day are not likely to return in every particular, though they have sometimes imitated them with wonderful exactness. Thus, in examining what the Apostles tell us of the evils of the last days, we may sometimes find a distinct and particular prophecy of a form of error which is now either dead and gone, or at least living only in some remote development. For instance, there is a

distinct description given in the Epistles of the Manichean heresy. In these prophecies, then, we must seek chiefly the roots and seeds and sources of the future apostacy, which are the same, more or less, in all ages and in every generation. In them we shall learn what to expect in the times to come, and what we are all to do battle against in our own time.

And now, when we turn to the Sacred Scriptures, and ask them what they have to tell us about the evil principles which shall rule the world to so large an extent in the latter days, we find that this prophecy, like that about Antichrist, fills a large space in the sacred pages, and is to be found in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Daniel tells us "that many shall be chosen and made white, and shall be tried as in the fire, that the wicked shall deal wickedly, that none of the wicked shall understand, but the learned shall understand ;"* and this, you see, corresponds to what St. Paul tells us of the delusions of the latter times, that because people receive not the love of the truth, God shall send upon them the operation of error, "to believe lying." What Daniel says about the blindness of those times our Lord Himself says about their lawlessness : " Because iniquity shall abound, the *charity* of many shall grow cold."† St. Peter, and St. Jude, who follows him, tell us about the scoffers and mockers, the disdainful despisers of revealed truths, those who "walk according to their own desires in ungodliness,"‡ and laugh at the expectation of Christians as to the fulfilment of the prophecies as to Christ's

* Dan. xi. 10. † Matt. xxiv. 12. ‡ St. Jude xviii. 2 St. Peter iii. 3.

second coming. In these passages, my brethren, we seem to have a faint though definite picture of men who will suppose that they have made themselves perfectly masters of the secrets of the physical universe, who have to their own satisfaction disproved the truths of the holy narrative of creation, and so think they have nothing to fear from anything as to the future which Scripture records by way of prophecy. I have already said that St. Peter tells us that these men will willingly forget the fact of God's one greatest interference with the physical order of things since the creation, within the range of human history, I mean the chastisement and almost entire extinction of the human race by the waters of the Flood.

If we put these descriptions together, my brethren, without proceeding further in our examination of the prophecies, we have a picture the chief features of which may thus be described: There is to be in the latter days a great disregard of all law, moral and social, human, natural, and divine; there is to be a great decay of charity in the largest sense of the term, of the natural charity which binds man to man, the tie of natural kindliness which should keep together the different members of the various unities which God, Who "maketh men to be of one mind," has established in the world, the family, the country, the race—as well, alas! as of that supernatural charity by which the children of God are bound together in Jesus Christ. There is to be a great blindness to truth, though witnessed to by evidence incontrovertible and luminous in the highest degree, and this blindness to, and dislike of, truth is to be accom-

panied by a strong and fanatical belief in debasing and corrupting delusions. This hatred of truth, and this love of ungodliness, are to be further punished by great intellectual pride, an arrogant reliance on supposed acquirements and false knowledge, which again is naturally to issue in contempt for the simple faith of Christians in the divine revelation, in the words of Scripture, and in the teaching of the Catholic Church.

You will observe, my brethren, that here we find no mention made of distinct heresies or false doctrines. There is rather to be a general decay or denial of all faith, and a sort of practical paganism. And thus we are prepared for what some old Christian writers tell us on this very subject of the future restoration of heathenism. There is a mysterious vision in the Apocalypse,* of a beast that was wounded, and, it seemed, slain, but which is brought to life again by the power of the false prophet, and adored by all on earth whose names are not written in the book of life. This vision is interpreted, by the writers to whom I allude, of heathenism, which has been, as it were, put to death by the Christian religion, but which will hereafter revive and reign for a short time. Now I say that, whether this old interpretation be certainly true or not, it is at least wonderfully confirmed by St. Paul's account of the latter times. I have as yet hardly alluded to this great Apostle, because his words are so clear and full that I have kept them for the last. St. Paul, if we may so say, is that one of the Apostles and of the writers of the

* Apoc. xiii. 3, 12.

New Testament who seems to have been commissioned to speak with a special force and authority both on the subject of the latter days and on all that concerns the heathen world. He, who had begun his life by being so exceedingly zealous for the traditions of Judaism, so that he had gone beyond all others in his care for them and in his hatred to the Church, which he looked upon as supplanting and subverting them, had afterwards, by the providence of God, to turn himself with a singular devotion, with a peculiar gift of intelligence and depth of sympathy, to the heathen world, for whose conversion he laboured so long and with so much blessing from God. We call him, my brethren, the Apostle of the Gentiles, not only because he preached so much among them, as other Apostles also preached, but for this reason also—that he had a gift and grace of his own to understand them, to penetrate the system which reigned among them, to put his finger upon its weakest points and the sources of its misery, and to apply to the special wounds which it had inflicted upon the human race the gentle medicines of truth and grace. And it may be said, without fear of contradiction, that if St. Paul were to be considered simply as a Christian philosopher commenting upon the evils and general tendencies of his own age, and of the system of the world under which he lived, he would have to be placed at the very head of all philosophical writers for the analysis and description which he has given us of the heathen world.

We have this description chiefly in two great documents—in St. Paul's speech at Athens to the

philosophers,* and in his account of the miseries of heathendom in the Epistle to the Romans.† I shall speak presently of a third great passage which I mean to compare with these, in which, years after his Epistle to the Romans, he describes the men of the latter times. Let us first deal with the account given by the Apostle of the heathenism among which he lived and worked. In his speech, then, at the Areopagus, St. Paul describes in brief God's ways of dealing with the world. He tells the Athenians, as you know, of the "unknown God," whom they worshipped in ignorance, Who, nevertheless, was the Creator and the Father of all. He had made of one blood, of one stock, of one nature, all nations on the face of earth. He had given them, as is implied in this, one moral law, one promise, one primeval tradition, one common hope of future salvation. Then He had, as it were, withdrawn, and left them to themselves, though still His providence ruled them, appointing the whole course of what is called the world's history, the rise, and fall, and character, and vicissitudes of nations and empires, and giving to all men, as St. Paul had said before at Iconium, abundance of good gifts, "Giving rains and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."‡ And the Apostle tells his hearers how the heathen had, as it were, to grope, like blinded men, after God, although He was all the time so near to them, as to all of us—"for in Him we live and move and be." And he speaks in the same place, though gently and reservedly, of those terrible and lamentable errors

* Acts xvii. 22—31. † Rom. i. 18—32. ‡ Acts xiv. 14—16.

into which the nations left to themselves had fallen, touching upon the crown and consummation of them all, the idolatrous worship of false gods.

And now we must turn to the other great passage, which must be compared with this of which I have been speaking, where, at the beginning of his Epistle to the Romans, the same Apostle gives what we may call a companion picture to the former, describing the manner in which the heathen nations had in return treated God, and the consequences to themselves in which that treatment had issued. He speaks of the inexcusable ingratitude of the heathen to so good and wonderful a Creator, of their refusal to acknowledge Him, notwithstanding the strong evidences concerning Himself which He had imprinted on the face and on the course of nature; of the punishment which fell on them—that of being given over to idolatry: and then again of the further punishment of this judicial delusion, by which they became the slaves of lusts which in their abominable degradation went even beyond the extreme indulgence of all natural animal appetites. You may remember, my brethren, that fearful picture, on the details of which it is not necessary that we should linger for any space of time this afternoon. The character of heathendom, as he describes it, is based, of course, on intense selfishness, working itself out in an eager grasping after all the objects of concupiscence, and so in avarice, in the reckless pursuit of pleasure at whatever cost to others, in the passionate love of earthly honour and position; then rising, as was only natural after this, into intense pride and haughtiness,

into unbending stubbornness of will and judgment, and, further still, wreaking itself on all who came across its path, in envy, contentiousness, violence, contumely, in malignant craft, or insolent and reckless cruelty. By the side of these savage features of debased humanity, we find placed, as is always the case in reality, a voluptuousness and licentiousness that knew no bounds. And these two great passions of lust and pride combine in the character of the heathen world, as drawn by St. Paul, to smother and destroy all those instincts of natural piety and goodness which are implanted in man by his Creator, to which his conscience witnesses, and which animate and sustain all that social and domestic life which is the fundamental condition of our being and our happiness as men. Hence we find in St. Paul's description of heathenism a number of traits which point to the want of all natural affection. The tie which binds parents to children, and children to parents, was dissolved ; so again, the law of faithfulness and truthfulness, which is essential in order that we may trust one another in the common intercourse of life, was set aside, as also the rule of gratitude and honesty, the law of respect for the characters of others in men's language, the observance of obligations, the habit of peaceableness, the practice of kindness, even the instinct of mercy to the conquered, the weak, the helpless, the afflicted—mercy, the one provision of God for the numberless and otherwise inconsolable miseries to which the world is given up!

Such, in brief, is this great description of the heathenism of his own time given us by St. Paul.

And now I come to the point of our argument concerning the latter days. This same great Apostle, as I have already said, has dwelt in more than one place on the characteristics of the men of those future times, as he has so often dwelt on the characteristics of the old heathen. We have already had occasion to examine what he has said in some of these passages ; but one great description remains, written, moreover, as I have said, at the very end of St. Paul's life, on the eve of his martyrdom, in his last Epistle to his beloved child Timothy.* This is the longest and most particular description given us by the Apostle, and striking as it is in itself, it is perhaps still more striking when it is compared with the earlier passage in the Epistle to the Romans, to which I have referred. If you will take that passage, in which the vices and degradation of the unconverted heathen world are described with so much indignant severity, and yet with a certain discriminating tenderness and largeness of sympathy, and if you will put it side by side with the other account which, by way of prophecy, St. Paul gives, so many years afterwards, of the corruptions of the latter days, you will find that with one or two striking differences, which I shall point out, the two passages tally exactly. The differences that exist are important in themselves, as we shall see ; and they are precious also on another ground, because they show us, if that be needed, that St. Paul has weighed his every word, that he has nowhere indulged in any mere expletives of invective, nowhere made one single charge, either against the

* 2 Tim. iii. 1, seq.

ancient heathenism or against its modern revival, without the fullest knowledge and the calmest deliberation. Bear with me, then, if I dwell for a few moments on the points of agreement and of difference between the two.

In that old heathenism of the Roman world, into which it was the will of God that the Christian religion should be introduced by the Apostles, there were three diverse and often conflicting elements. There was a good element, which came from God; there was a thoroughly bad element, which came from Satan; and there was a corrupt element, which was the fruit of the workings of unregenerate human nature upon society, and upon the objects of sense and intelligence with which man is placed in relation. The good element we see embodied in great part of the laws and institutions of the ancient world, as also in much of the literature, the poetry, the philosophy of Greece and Rome, which literature consequently—after having been purified and, as it were, baptized—has always been used by the Christian Church in the education of her children. This element, I say, was originally the gift of God, the Author of Nature, to man, the offspring of reason and conscience, the tradition of a society of which God was Himself the founder. It enshrined whatever fragments of primeval truth as to God, the world, and man himself, still lingered, in whatever shape, among the far-wandering children of Adam. St. Paul alludes to this element in the first passage on which we dwell to-day, and his words altogether seem to imply that God watched over it, supported it, and fostered it, as

far as men were worthy of it, and that it might even have been expanded into a perfect system of natural religion and of reasonable virtue, had men been grateful enough to earn larger measures of grace from God, Who left not Himself without witness in His daily providence, and was "not far from" any one of His children.

But now we come to another element, which just now I placed the last of the three, the workings of which we may distinguish in the heathen world. All flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth, and man had shut out the knowledge of God from his soul, and had let his passions lead him instead of his conscience. The unregenerate instincts of nature gradually overpowered the moral law in the heart of man, and their victory reflected itself in the rules of society, in the customs and maxims by which human life was guided. In proportion as man became more and more the master of the world, as wealth and power, and knowledge and experience increased, as civilisation (so to call it) and means of communication advanced, there grew up that great system of cruelty and immorality, of the godless pursuit of pleasure and worldly ends, which we call paganism. For paganism is not properly a religion so much as a system of human life and human society, according to the impulses and unbridled lusts of the natural man, checked only by what remained of strength in the law of right as written in men's hearts, in the voice of conscience, and in the old traditions of better days, and also by the law of necessity which made it imperative that

society should in some way or other be kept alive and held together. St. Paul, in the passage to the Romans on which we have dwelt, has described to us, my brethren, what sort of men they were who were penetrated by this pagan spirit. And now, as I have already said, when the same Apostle comes to describe the men of the latter days, he paints them, as to all moral degradation, in the same colours as the pagans of his own time. The two passages correspond as to this word for word ; the latter text is almost a repetition of the former. Thus far, then, we have St. Paul's authority for saying that the apostacy of the latter days will be a return to heathenism, understanding by that word the godless system of life and manners which is the fruit of the unrestrained development and reign of the lower instincts of human nature.

These thoughts bring us to the third element of paganism—that which I call the work of Satan, the enemy of God and man. As to this, also, we have St. Paul's authority, in that passage where in a few short words he tells us that the gods of the heathen were devils.* We, my brethren, are often inclined to look upon the personages of which the heathen mythology is made up as a number of poetic creations, as the powers of nature symbolised, or perhaps, at the worst, as great men and famous heroes of fabulous times raised by a sort of natural canonisation to the thrones of a higher world. This is the human part of the heathen religions, skilfully used by the authors of evil to disguise their own work for

* 1 Cor. x. 20.

the delusion of men. But there was more behind those forms of apparent grace and beauty than the imagination of earthly poets. This might have been seen, we might truly say, by the base impurities in which they were steeped. No, my brethren, unless St. Paul is mistaken, unless thousands of Christian Martyrs were mistaken who treated the heathen idols as the forms under which the apostate angels were adored, the gods of the heathen were Satan and his associates, permitted by the just judgment of God to draw to themselves the adoration which men had denied to Him; and taking care to deify in themselves every shape of human vice and passion, and to exact from their worshippers impure rites and filthy mysteries, that man, made in the image of God, might learn from them to degrade himself even beneath the level of the beasts of the field. Or, if we want a still more clear proof of the Satanic agencies which underlay the pagan religion, we may find it in that other kind of worship which it exacted in the ancient world, and is still found to exact—I mean the frightful tribute of human sacrifice, a custom widely spread and almost universal among pagan nations, some of whom have astonished even their Christian discoverers by their mildness and gentleness, their courtesy and simplicity, and yet have been found to be penetrated to the core by corruption, and to be in the habit of honouring their gods by the frightful homage of hecatombs of human victims, a homage enough of itself to proclaim as its author the hater alike of man, and of God Who created him!

Here then, my brethren, we have come to that part of the comparison as to which it need not be said that St. Paul's two descriptions are identical. We need not exaggerate the miseries of our own time, nor draw in darker colours than St. Paul the evil features of the last great apostacy. The Son of God, as another Apostle tells us, was "manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil,"* and I do not find, in any of the prophetic descriptions of the restored paganism of modern days, that the system of the worship of false gods is to revive, with its abominable rites of blood and its mysteries of licentiousness. Wherever the Cross has been once firmly planted, we may surely hope that the world has seen the last of the public worship of Satan. In St. Paul's description of the latter days, I find the blasphemy of the true God substituted for the worship of devils. But, my brethren, the Son of God was not manifested altogether to destroy the works of man. He came to raise man, change him, regenerate him, sanctify him, by uniting him to Himself. He did not come to take away man's free will, or to tear out of his nature those seeds of possible evil which produced all the human part of the paganism on which we have been reflecting. The empire of Satan has been overthrown, but alas! man is still his own great enemy, and though our Lord has armed him against himself, He has still left him the power to mar the work of God in his own soul, and this power, which each one of us possesses in his own case, is always fearfully active in the corruption of the Christian

* 1 John iii. 8.

society, the character of which is the result and the reflection of that of the parts of which it is made up.

And now, my brethren, what need have we of any subtlety of inquiry or refinement of speculation to tell us that this modern heathenism of which the prophecies speak is around us on every side? Mankind are in many senses far mightier, and the resources and enjoyments at their command are far ampler, than in the days of old. We are in possession of the glorious but intoxicating fruits of that advanced civilisation and extended knowledge which has sprung up from the seeds which the Church of God has, as it were, dropped on her way through the world. Society has been elevated and refined, but on that very account it has become capable of a more penetrating degradation, of a more elegant and a more poisonous corruption. Knowledge has been increased, but on the increase of knowledge has followed the increase of pride. Science has unravelled the laws of nature and the hidden treasures of the material universe, and they place fresh combinations of power and new revelations of enjoyment in the hands of men who have not seen in the discovery increased reasons for self-restraint or for reverence for the Giver of all good gifts. The world, the home of the human race, has been opened to civilised man in all its distant recesses, and he has taken, or is taking, possession of his full inheritance ; but his onward path is the path of avarice and greed, of lust and cruelty, and he seizes on each new land as he reaches it in the spirit of the merchant or the conqueror, not in that of the harbinger of peace, the

bearer of the good tidings of God. At home, in Christendom itself, we hear, as our Lord said, of wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. In the Apostles' time, it was an unheard of thing that the majestic peace and unity of the Roman Empire should not absorb and keep in harmony a hundred rival nationalities. In our time it is not to be thought of that the supernatural bond of the Christian Church should be able to keep nations which are brethren in the faith from devouring one another.

Or, again, my brethren, let us turn from public to private life. Look at social life, look at domestic manners; consider the men and women of the present day in their amusements, their costumes, the amount of restraint they put upon the impulses of nature; compare them at their theatres and their recreations, compare them as to their treatment of the poor and the afflicted classes; compare them, again, as to the style of art which they affect, or the literature in which they delight, with the old heathen of the days of St. Paul. I do not say, God forbid! that there is not a wide and impassable gulf between the two, for that would be to say that so many centuries of Christendom had been utterly wasted, and that the Gospel law has not penetrated to the foundations of society, so that it is not true that our Lord rules, as the Psalmist says, "in the midst of His enemies,"* even over the world, which would fain emancipate itself from His sway. But I do say, that if a Christian of the first ages

* Psalm cix. 2.

were to rise from the dead, and examine our society, point by point, on the heads which I have intimated, and compare it, on the one hand, with the polished refined heathen whom he may have known at the courts of Nero or Domitian, and, on the other, with the pure strict holiness of his own brethren in the faith who worshipped with him in the catacombs, he might find it difficult indeed to say that what he would see around him in London or Paris was derived by legitimate inheritance rather from the traditions of the martyr Church than from the customs of the persecuting heathen. He would miss the violence, the cruelty, the riotous and ruffianly lust, the extraordinary disrespect for humanity and human life which distinguished the later Roman civilisation; but he would find much of its corruption, much of its licentiousness, much of its hardness of heart. The unregenerate instincts of human nature are surging up like a great sea all around us, society is fast losing all respect for those checks upon the innate heathenism of man which have been thrown over the surface of the world by the Church. It is becoming an acknowledged law that whatever is natural is right, and by nature is meant nature corrupted by sin, nature unilluminated by faith and unassisted by grace—that is, the lower appetites of man in revolt against conscience, looking for no home but earth and no satisfaction but in the present, “having no hope of the promise, and without God in this world.” *

I conclude, my brethren, with one or two con-

* Ephes. ii. 12.

siderations which naturally rise to the mind in the presence of such thoughts as these. First, all these dangers with which we are beset, which have their roots in human nature, and whose growth is fostered by the condition of the world, have been met by our Lord Jesus Christ, and are provided for in the Church. We are apt to marvel at what we may deem the superfluous richness and profusion of what we may call the armament of the Church, the variety of the means of grace, the multiplied channels by which heavenly strength is conveyed to fainting and wounded souls. And yet not one of all these is needless; the whole strength and all the weapons of the Church will be strained to the utmost in her final struggle. The whole might of unregenerate nature, in its undying repugnance to submit to the restraints of the law of God, is bearing down upon the Christian bulwarks of society with a weight as immense, and as relentless in its pressure on every part, as the tide of a whole ocean, which is swung in its daily flow against the rocks and cliffs of a far-stretching continent. What can resist it? One force alone, the force of God, who sets bounds to the sea, and can check the raging passions of a whole race. We hear little in the latter days of heresies and schisms, of isolated communities and partial forms of Christianity. These things will have had their day and have done much evil in it, but they are too frail and miserable in themselves to live on the surges of that last tempest of humanity—the Church alone can ride out the storm.

But again, my brethren, how does the Church

deal with such assaults as those we are contemplating? She works, no doubt, by the sacraments and the other means of grace, by the word of God preached and taught in the sanctuary, and the like. But the strongholds of the Church are in the family and the school; her battlefields are those on which such questions as that of the sanctity of marriage and that of the purity of Christian education are fought out. Give her the forming of her children, and she will train up the Christian youth and maiden, she will join them in a holy bond to form the family, of Christian families she will compose Christian communities, Christian nations, and out of Christian nations she will build up Christendom, a Christian world. She can cure nature, and nothing else can. Give her free scope, and you will hear little of that long list of heathen vices of which you have heard to-day; little of men being covetous, contentious, slaves of avarice and licentiousness, there will be no complaints of the decay of mercy, or of natural affection, of human kindness, honesty, faithfulness.

So then, in these our days, can we too often remind ourselves of the points of attack chosen by the enemies of faith and of society? Can we forget with what a wearisome sameness of policy the war is waged year after year, first in one place and then in another; how certain it is that as soon as we hear that some nation hitherto guided by Catholic instincts has become a convert to the enlightened ideas of our times, the next day will bring the further tidings that in that nation marriage is no longer to be treated as a sacrament, and that education is to be

withdrawn from the care of the Church and her ministers? And, indeed, my brethren, we know not how soon we ourselves may be engaged in a deadly conflict, on one at least, of these points. Up to this time we, at least in England, have been able to train our children for ourselves. And, to give honour where honour is due, we have owed our liberty in great measure to the high value which certain communities outside the Church set upon distinctively Christian and doctrinal instruction. But we know not how soon the tide of war may come to our homes. We hear a cry in the air—it says that the child belongs to the State, and that it is the duty of the State to take his education to itself. The cry is false; the child belongs to the parent, belongs to the Church, belongs to God. In that cry speaks the reviving paganism of our day. Surely it should teach us, if nothing else can, the paramount importance of Christian education. If we give in to that cry we are lost. Train up your children, my brethren, in the holy discipline and pure doctrine of the Church, and they are formed thereby to be soldiers of Jesus Christ in the coming conflict against the powers of evil. Train them up in indifference to religion and Christian doctrine, and if they are not at once renegades from their faith, at least they are far too weak and faint-hearted in their devotion to the Church to range themselves courageously among her champions in her terrible battle against the last apostacy.

SERMON IV.

ALL THINGS MADE NEW.*

Et audi vi vocem magnam de throno dicentem : Ecce tabernaculum Dei cum hominibus, et habitabit cum eis. Et ipsi populus ejus erunt, et ipse Deus cum eis erit eorum Deus. Et absterget Deus omnem lacrymam ab oculis eorum, et mors ultra non erit, neque luctus, neque clamor, neque dolor erit ultra, quia prima abierunt. Et dixit Qui sedebat in throno : "Ecce, nova facio omnia."

And I heard a great voice from the Throne, saying, Behold the Tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself with them shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor sorrow, nor crying shall be any more, for the former things are passed away; and He that sat on the Throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

(Words taken from the 3rd, 4th, and 5th verses of the 21st chapter of the Apocalypse.)

IN these words the Beloved Disciple of Jesus Christ describes the state of things which shall be established when his Lord comes for the second time. And now, in the midst of the joy of the Feast of His first coming, it is our business this afternoon, my brethren in Jesus Christ, to dwell for a short time upon what the Holy Scripture tells us of the chief features of that second advent of His which is to close the history of this present world, and be the opening scene of the new history of our race, redeemed in Heaven. I say it is the close of the first

* Preached on the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, being the Feast of St. John the Evangelist.

creation, and the opening of the second, and that, when we consider it, we should not separate the latter aspect of it from the former aspect. We see that this lies at the root of the difference between our own common way of looking at our Lord's second coming, and the way in which the Christians to whom the Apostles wrote looked upon it—that to them it was rather a beginning than an end; and to us, commonly, it is rather an end than a beginning. An end is done with and gone, a beginning lives on in that to which it gives birth. Of the two features, I say, the earlier Christians dwelt more on the one, and we are more inclined to dwell on the other. Their thoughts of what they looked to were more distinct and penetrating, they had a firmer grasp of the realities of the world to come than we have. And yet, if they had altogether forgotten the terrible part of the second advent, they would not so well have fitted themselves to be partakers of its glories and its blessings. So also, my brethren, in our preparation to meet Him as our Judge, we must not forget to dwell on the great and marvellous blessings which our Lord will bring in His train. He Himself, in His discourses and parables, has dwelt on both one and the other topic, and His Apostles and Prophets have done likewise. They have taken the greatest pains to describe for us the blessings which await us under a wondrous variety of figures, so that there is hardly anything precious and pleasant in this life which Jesus Christ, or His servants, have not used as images to prepare us for the delights of the life which is to come. And so this evening, under the guidance of

that Beloved Disciple—at once Apostle, Evangelist, Doctor, Prophet, Virgin, Martyr, and the special child of Mary—whose Feast we are keeping, we will first of all shortly remind ourselves of the series of events which, according to Sacred Scripture, are to happen at the end of time, and then we will dwell for a while more particularly upon those features in the prophecy on which the hopes and confidence of Christians are meant to rest.

And here again, before we proceed further, let me say one or two words as to the manner in which we are to explain unfulfilled prophecy in general. There are certain rules which we must keep in view if we would do this with safety, one or two alone of which need be mentioned now. In the first place, we are very likely to deceive ourselves if we aim at fixing the exact time of future events with any precision. We have seen how our Lord has expressly told us, with regard to the end of the world, that the Father keeps the times and seasons in His own power, and that it is not for us to know them.* And moreover, even if this were set aside, we must remember what I have already had occasion to mention, that God's mode of estimating time is very different indeed from our mode. A thousand years are to Him as a day, and a day as a thousand years. In the second place, we may remind ourselves of this—that not only is the time of the end of the world uncertain to us, but that also the order of the several events which make up, as it were, this great scene of prophetic vision, is frequently not clear. We know

* Acts i. 7.

that a certain number of great things will happen, but which is to be first, which is to be last among them, we do not know. The Prophets of God often predict one and the same thing in many different ways, and thus visions which may seem to form a consecutive series are, in truth, prophecies of one and the same event. Again, they often predict a part of some great history, and not the whole—as St. Paul says to the Corinthians, “We know in part, and we prophecy in part.”* Thus it may not always be easy to combine the fragments, as it were, which they severally furnish to us into any certain order.

Now I say that the matter before us this afternoon gives us more than one example of this uncertainty. We know, for instance, that there are to be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars,† disturbances in the physical order of the world, in land and in sea, before the last coming of Jesus Christ. And yet again we are told that that day is to come as a thief in the night, as a snare, at a time when men least expect it. The day of the Son of Man is to be like the days of Noe, or the days of Lot, when the coming Flood was not thought of, and the destruction of the Cities of the Plain was expected by no one. There are two ways of explaining this, but we are unable to decide between the two; we are unable to say whether these great signs of which we are told are to go before the rising of Antichrist, and that after his victory the world is to be in apparent peace at the moment of our Lord’s coming, or whether, as it seems to have been in the

* 1 Cor. xiii. 9. † St. Luke xxi. 25, 26.

days of Noe, the warnings of God, however great and signal, will be utterly disregarded by the men of that generation, so that, notwithstanding all the signs in heaven and on earth, they will be sunk in utter security and forgetfulness of God's threats, under the dominion of the enemy of Christ. In that case, the signs would be contemporaneous with the absolute recklessness of men as to their future fate; and we know too well the hardness of the human heart under great calamities to be surprised at the prediction. It has often been seen that, when God has visited the world, or certain particular countries, with the great plagues which have left their mark on the history of the centuries in which they have happened, men, instead of being converted by the visitation, have given themselves up all the more recklessly to the extravagances of vice and debauchery; and we all know how truly our Lord has said of those who are not touched by the ordinary and appointed ministrations of warning, that they "would not be converted, though one went to them from the dead."*

This, then, is one of the points as to which uncertainty hangs over the prophecy, at least as to the order of time. I will mention one more great feature of the vision, as to which there is a difficulty of the same kind. There are many passages in Scripture which speak plainly of the future destruction of the world in which we live by fire.† It is hardly possible to allow that these texts can be fairly interpreted in any merely figurative sense, and I will give for this only one amply sufficient reason.

* St. Luke xvi. 31. † *e.g.*, Isa. xvi. 6; Psalm ciii. 27, xcvi. 3.

St. Peter, in a passage which I have already had occasion to quote, compares the future destruction of the world by fire to the historical destruction of the human race in the days of Noe by the waters of the Deluge. He says: "The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of the ungodly men."* Now, my brethren, as you know, it might not be forbidden to us to think that the Deluge, though universal as to the destruction of mankind, may not have been universal in extent over the whole globe, which may not then have been inhabited in all its parts.† But though we might not see reason for condemning those who consider that the Deluge may have been partial in this sense, we should contradict Scripture if we were to say that it was figurative. And it would be inconsistent with the plain sense of the words of St. Peter to explain the fire of which he speaks as being less literal and real than the Deluge with which he compares it. The earth, therefore, is to be burnt up by fire; but here, again, the facts of the future that is coming upon the earth are more certain than their order. We cannot say for certain when this conflagration is to take place; whether it is to be before the Judgment Day, and so, perhaps, the means of the death of the generation of men that is in possession of the earth at the latter days, or whether it is to take place after that great day of account, or, as some have thought, partly before and partly after.

* 2 Peter, iii. 6, 7.

† See Note to this Sermon.

This, then, as well as the great signs of which I have before spoken, must be counted among the great features of the prophecy, although we are not absolutely certain as to the order in which they are to be arranged. And as to the other wonders of that time, what need is there for me to dwell on them to-day? We know that all mankind shall rise, though, as the Apostle says, not all shall be changed.* Some shall rise to honour, some to ignominy, some to glory both of body and soul, others to eternal shame and suffering in both. The Angels shall go forth, and separate the wicked from among the good; then shall be the manifestation of the consciences of all to all, the perfect rectification of all judgments, the absolute vindication of all the dealings of God with souls, the triumph of virtue and right, the speechless self-conviction and exposure of all that has been wrong and vicious; then shall the eternal sentence come home to the hearts of all, witnessed to and acknowledged by every conscience singly, and proclaimed aloud, as to every child of Adam, in the hearing of Heaven and earth—"And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting."†

And now, my brethren, as we must select some one or two out of the number of thoughts which crowd upon us as we survey, however briefly, this chain of great and marvellous events so closely linked together, the rapid unfolding of which is to be the history of the last few years of the world, I will choose those which seem most in keeping with

* 1 Cor. xv. 21.

† Matt. xxv. 46.

the holy and happy season now upon us, and which are most frequently suggested to us by the language used by the holy Apostles, and by the tone of thought which they inculcate upon their disciples. No doubt the coming of Jesus Christ is the "great and terrible day of the Lord." Who, as Malachias says, "shall be able to think of the day of His coming, and who shall stand to see Him? For He is like a refiner's fire."* Who can think of the signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, of the shaking of the powers of the physical universe, of the plagues and woes of the latter time, of the earth burnt up as a scroll, of the terrible voice of the Archangel, of the dead summoned to judgment, of the throne set and the books opened, of all the tribes of the earth wailing because of the sign of the Son of Man in the Heavens—who can think of all these things without fear and dread, such as breathe in the strains which the Church puts into our mouths as we sing her last hymn over the bier of the departed? *Quantus tremor est futurus!* or, *Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?* or, *Rex tremendæ majestatis, qui salvandos salvas gratis, salva me, fons pietatis!* And yet, my brethren, there are other strains, which, as I may say, ring more frequently in our ears as we listen to the words of Jesus Christ and the blessed Apostles of His Gospel. As we sing the *Dies Iræ* we are thinking how to expiate to the utmost what remains there may be of the debt which man owes to God's justice, and so we do well to fill ourselves with the emotions of fear and awe which suit the

* Mal. iii. 2.

temper of humble and earnest pleading for the dead by means of the Holy Sacrifice. But God's justice is a justice of reward as well as of punishment—of restitution, renovation, crowning and blessing for the sake of Jesus Christ, Who is not only the end of the old creation but the Beginning and First-born of the new. And so our Lord says to us: "When these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand."* And so I find the latter times spoken of by the holy Apostles. I find St. Peter speaking of them as the times of the "restitution of all things;" "when the times of refreshment shall come from the presence of the Lord."† And St. Paul's Epistles are full of hope and longing expectation of the appearance of Jesus Christ. It is a thought always before him and those to whom he writes, so that, as I have shown you, he had even to warn his disciples at Thessalonica that they were not to look immediately for the "glory to come which is to be revealed in us."‡ As to himself, St. Paul is looking forward to the crown of justice which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to him in that day, and "not only," as he says, "to me, but to them also that love His coming."|| Those that love the coming of our Lord will certainly desire it and long for it, and the feelings of fear and awe which its terrible features naturally arouse will be swallowed up in those of loving expectation. And to love and expectation, as characteristics of the feelings of Christians with regard to the latter days,

* Luke xxi. 28.

‡ Rom. viii. 18. 2 Thess. ii.

† Acts iii. 20, 21.

|| 2 Tim. iv. 8.

we may add, on St. Peter's authority, a still more surprising quality, that of perfect tranquillity and peace. "Seeing then," he says, "that all these things are to be dissolved, what manner of people ought you to be in holy conversation and godliness," in the daily practice of virtue, and in religious exercises of devotion? "looking for," and not only that, but "hasting unto the coming of the day of the Lord, by which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with the burning heat!" But he says, "We look for new heavens and a new earth, according to His promises, in which justice dwelleth. Wherefore, dearly beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent, that you may be found undefiled and unspotted to Him in peace."* Joy, longing, desire, careful and diligent preparation, such are the feelings, and such, if I may so speak, is the attitude which the coming of the day of the Lord is to find in us, if we are like the Christians to whom the Apostles wrote. Let us, then, consider one by one a few of the elements of this joyous anticipation and desire.

In the first place, my brethren, we have already hinted that the New Testament bids us look on the coming of our Lord, not only as the end of all the misery, and the conflict, and the uncertainty of this life; not only, again, as the great day of account, when the throne is to be set and the books opened, when the great separation of good from evil is to take place, and the eternal rewards and eternal punishments will be awarded—but particularly, and before

* 2 Peter iii. 11—14.

all, as the dawn of a day whose sun shall never set, as the beginning of a life of blessedness and of a new order of things, which shall never change nor end. Nor was this expectation a merely general and vague expectation, but it had its anticipations of the renovation and glorification of human life and existence in every particular in which it is now liable to infirmity, decay, and corruption. The coming of our Lord was to bring them, in one word, "life from the dead"—a new, restored, blessed, endless life, answering in all its features, though raised so infinitely higher in respect of its happiness, to the life of which we have experience here and now. We, such as we are, are to be made blessed in every respect. My brethren, if we divide the life we live into portions, as it were, according to the several parts of our compound being, the occupation of all our faculties on the scenes in which we dwell, the objects before us, the companions in whose affection and society we live, we find that in each of these departments we have powers and capacities of happiness which are disappointed and dissatisfied now, and we can only imagine ourselves happy when, in all these respects, we have what our nature craves for and is intended for by God. The mind, the soul, the heart, the body, have each their life—a life of uncertain, insecure, imperfect, and transient pleasure here, at the best; a life, in most cases, with much of positive pain and misery mingled in it. We are set in the midst of a universe of which we have not the key, the powers of which are often hostile and fatal to us; and we are made dependent one on

another, endowed with immense faculties of loving and understanding our fellows, and yet with a wall of division raised between us, with no power of reading one another's hearts, and with pettiness, selfishness, and other evil passions within us, to prevent us from reaching out of ourselves to perfect sympathy one with another.

Well then, I say, that the coming of our Lord was looked upon by the Apostolic Christians as the healing of all these wounds at once and for ever, as placing us in a condition of ineffable bliss in every one of these particulars. I do not speak now of the glory of the soul made perfect and confirmed in grace, the will for ever united to the will of God, the intelligence filled with His light, the whole heart and mind beatified by the sight of Him. This blessedness of the soul may be given before the time of the resurrection of the body and of the general judgment, and those who die in grace become heirs of it when they die. Only, let us observe that in the next life it will not be with the children of God as it is here. Here, if a Saint is visited by special favour and for a short time, as St. Paul was caught up into Heaven and heard unspeakable words, it is as he says, "whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell"—there is too great a strain in ordinary cases for bodily life and sense to retain their full vigour and activity, they are rapt in ecstasy and overpowered by it. They seem dead, and without perception of anything but God. This is on account of the weakness of our present existence, even in the highest Saints; though we read nothing of this kind

in what Scripture tells us of our Lord's Humanity and of His Blessed Mother. It will not be so in the next life, even though our union with God there is far closer and is permanent. Then the blessedness of the soul will overflow on to the body without impeding its full life and activity and enjoyment. One part of our compound nature will no longer be a drag upon the other, but both will share in the same immortal life, the same heavenly strength and beatitude. As the Angels calmly, and with perfect ease and tranquillity, see and enjoy God and know all things in Him, and yet while they are rapt in the contemplation of Him they converse one with another, and at the same time watch over the universe which is committed to their charge and guard us upon earth, whispering holy thoughts, warding off dangers, guiding our footsteps, and keeping back our infernal foes, always with God, and always with us, as holy Raphael journeyed with Tobias, and yet said, "I am Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the Lord,"*—so in the next world with us, the beatific vision and possession of God will not absorb our faculties or impede the other functions of our divine life, rather it will be the principle of that life in all its fulness and activity of enjoyment, of the life of the glorified body, of the life which occupies itself in the companionship of the Saints, in the contemplation of God's creation, in the reading of the marvellous secrets of His providence and His mysteries, in the perfect possession of all whom we love in Him.

* Tob. xii. 15.

Yes, my brethren, these bodies of ours are no longer to be prisons to us, full of danger, but are to glow with the perfect life which Jesus Christ brought with Him from the grave. The early Christians knew this well. They looked beyond the destruction of all things to the new and beautiful and happy creation which had been begun in Jesus Christ, and which was to burst into full life and bloom and glory at His second coming. They looked back for a moment to the days of Paradise, and they found that in each particular of blessedness in which the state of innocence had surpassed that condition of misery in which we now are enchained, that state of innocence again was to be far surpassed in the new Kingdom of Christ. Let us begin with the body, to please and pamper which we are so often tempted to forego the future glories of the children of God. "Who shall deliver me," says St. Paul, "from the body of this death?"* Who shall deliver me from the evil law in my members warring against my soul? Who shall deliver me from sickness and pain, and weariness, and death! "We ourselves," he says, "even we who are regenerate, or who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our body."† "For we know," as he goes on in another place, "that if our earthly home of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a home not made with hands, eternal in Heaven. For in this also we groan, desiring to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from

* Romans vii. 24.

† Romans viii. 23.

Heaven.”* “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”† The coming of our Lord was to them the time when He would “reform the body of our lowliness made like to the body of His glory,”‡ when He will give to each one of those who rise again to that wondrous change, which is to be the lot of His Saints, a body like to His own as it is now in glory, a body like to His when He showed Himself in His majesty to the Apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration.

It is, therefore, a little thing, too little for God to do for us for the sake of our Lord, to give us back again the integrity and health and bloom and beauty of our first parents before their fall. It is too little to destroy the conflict of sense and conscience, to root out the principles of concupiscence, to endow us with perfect impassibility and freedom from pain. That was the gift of an innocent and untried nature, but now we have to inherit the fruits of conflict and of conquest for God through Jesus Christ. “It became Him,” says the Apostle, “for Whom are all things and by Whom are all things, Who was bringing many children into glory, to perfect the Author of their salvation by His Passion.”|| It was fitting that when God undertook to raise a vast multitude of the human race to the dignity of His sons, and to bring them into His own glory, that He should provide that that glory which was to be so nobly won and the crown of so many great gifts, should have the full merit of the Passion of Jesus.

* 2 Cor. v. 1, 2.

† 1 Cor. xv. 53.

‡ Philipp. iii. 21.

|| Heb. ii. 10.

Christ and of the sufferings of His followers to enhance its beauty and its intensity. Here then, my brethren, is the Christian answer to those who are so fond of what is called the full development of our natural being, who consider the perfection of man to consist in healthy animal life, whether moral or not, who ask, why God has given us our bodily instincts and cravings if they are never to be satisfied and always to be mortified? They are to be mortified and kept under now, that our bodies hereafter may rise, not to disgrace and ignominy, but to glory and brightness and immortality, glowing with life and beauty; real flesh and blood, as our Lord after the Resurrection had real flesh and blood, but spiritualised, made heavenly and deathless, and destined to endless enjoyment in the exercise of the marvellous gifts then bestowed upon them.

Again, my brethren, the Christians of the Apostles' time looked to our Lord's coming as the renovation and restoration of the physical universe itself, in which our lot is cast. St. Paul had taught them that the present state of things, even in the physical universe, was a penal state, a state inflicted upon the creation by God in consequence of the fall of man—man, who had incurred death for himself and brought his earthly home and the world itself into the servitude of corruption. The change and decay and succession and waste, which all nature undergoes, are consequences of sin, and we look forward, as St. Paul says, "to the revelation of the sons of God"* as the time when "the creature shall be delivered from this

* Romans viii. 19.

servitude into the liberty of the glory of the children of God ;” or we look, as St. Peter says, “for new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwelleth.”* My brethren, we all know that nothing that man can frame or imagine can be compared for sublimity, beauty, delicacy, gracefulness, and grandeur, to the natural works of God, and yet we are taught that the mighty mountains, and the boundless sea, and whatever there is that ravishes our eye or ear in tree or flower, in plant or bird or animal, is to be supplanted at our Lord’s coming by creatures more noble, more beautiful, more wonderful, than any that the earth has yet known. When God made this varied universe out of nothing He did not make the best that He could make, and for the dwelling-place and home of His children through Jesus Christ He will make new heavens and a new earth, to which these shall be as nought. And this is one Christian answer to those who ask why religion sets so little store upon physical knowledge, why she looks, as it seems, coldly and unfavourably upon those who give their lives to the investigation of secrets of nature, why she accounts all their acquirements as nothing in comparison to a single holy thought, or to a cup of cold water given to a traveller for the sake of Jesus Christ. I do not say there are not other answers, but this is among the answers ; that all these things are, as St. Peter says, “to be dissolved and come to nought.” At present they help us by their use, and by the knowledge we may gain from them of the goodness and the power of their Maker. They

* 2 Peter iii. 13.

serve our mortal life, also, and are to be received and used with thankfulness and joy. But still the children of God have a fairer and more majestic home in store for them, filled with creations of His power and love far more marvellous, and their intelligence is hereafter to feed itself upon their contemplation, and their life is to be diversified by the use of the new creation. But then they will read and know, and understand and enjoy, without fear of presumption and error, without the possibility of mistake, obscurity, or impurity of intention, because they will see and comprehend all things around them in the light of the vision of God Himself.

And once more, my brethren—only to touch most shortly upon what, next to the possession of God, will be the greatest joy of the new state of existence—as we are made to love and to be companions one to another, to live, as it were, outside ourselves, open to a perpetual interchange and flow of influence and sympathy, to feel loneliness as a privation, and brotherly love and mutual intelligence as our greatest blessing—so it will be in our regenerate state, when this our life of isolation and separation will be at an end. There will no longer be barriers and veils of separation and diffidence between us, but we shall each rejoice in and profit by the gifts of all others as if they were our own. And this blessed society which awaits us in the next world was the frequent contemplation of the Saints, and is set before us as a motive of hope and exertion by St. Paul. “For ye are come,” he says, “to Mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, and to the company of many

thousands of Angels, and to the Church of the first-born who are written in the heavens, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Testament.”*

Surely, my brethren, it is nothing strange if, with the Babe of Bethlehem before us on the knees of His Immaculate Mother, we raise our hearts and send forth our thoughts, as did the Christians of old, to that most blessed consummation and restitution of all things which is the great end of His coming amongst us at all. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not with Him also given us all things?”† What is simply reasonable, in looking forward to what is coming upon our race and upon the earth in which we dwell, but that we should pass by the things which are transient, and dwell rather upon the things which shall abide and shall never change? Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the words and the work of Jesus Christ our Lord shall not pass away.

There shall come plagues, and woes, and tribulations, and persecutions, and apostacies—but they shall pass. The civil system of the world, the principles which hold society together, shall be sapped and undermined; but this also shall pass. There shall come the enemy of God, the rival of Jesus Christ, the most vaunted and the most fascinating of the world’s heroes, armed with powers such as never yet have been placed in the hands of one man; he shall seduce and subdue the nations, he shall wage terrible war

* Heb. xii. 22—24.

† Rom. viii. 30.

against the Saints of God, he shall prevail for a moment, but he shall not seduce the Elect—and he too shall pass away. There shall come that great apostacy on which we have lately reflected, the restoration for a time of the hideous reign of unregenerated nature in all its savage voluptuousness and refined cruelty under a new form of paganism—but that shall pass. The birth pangs of the new creation shall be terrible, earthquakes and incursions of the sea, the sun turned to darkness and the moon to blood, the stars falling, the world shaken to its foundations; the death of the human race will be terrible, the burning of the heavens and the earth with fervent heat—but all this shall pass. The awful Day of Judgment will come, the resurrection of the dead, the opening of the books, the eternal separation, the rewards and punishments allotted by the mouth of the Son of Man. But even the Day of Judgment will pass away, and be at an end; and then shall break forth that eternal and most glorious morning, the new creation and condition of things wrought by the infinite wisdom and the power of God for the sake of those who love Him. Heaven and earth purified and renovated, the souls of the Saints filled with divine intelligence and indefectible and boundless love, the mind enlightened by the light of God's countenance, the will and heart ennobled and beatified by inseparable and closest union with Him, the body endowed with the gifts requisite for the ceaseless exercise and enjoyment of its new spiritualised existence—bright as the sun, deathless, painless, incapable of fatigue, decay, or feebleness,

having changed its subjection to the trammels of space and natural laws of motion for the freedom and activity of angelical life. Mutual knowledge, society, companionship, love, confidence, tenderness, endearment, the union of heart with heart in the possession of those whom we love ; these things, at the earthly shadow of which we so often grasp in vain, to our hurt and disappointment, and, it may be, to the staining of our souls, will then for the first time become truths and realities in the perfect union of the children of God in all the marvellous variety of their individual perfections, and in the daily play and working of their glorified faculties of heart and mind. The Christian people will then indeed be a holy nation, a community, a society, a family, in which all will be wise, all great, all lovely, all powerful, with the riches of the wisdom, and the might, and the power, and the beauty of God their Father. What their dwelling will be, what their thoughts, what their occupations in the exercise of their new life—of these we can no more know, or, rather, far less, than the savage of the ice-bound north can know what is the social life, what are the enjoyments, and resources, and refinements, and natural blessings of the civilised communities who possess the fairest regions of the world, and inherit all the achievements and conquests of humanity ; or than children in their nursery can guess of the intellectual delights and lofty dreams of the poet or the sage. Only we know that as we have this varied and marvellous being given to us by the hand of our God and Creator, every part of our nature, every faculty of mind, and heart, and body,

will have its own ineffable beatitude in the kingdom of His glory. We are now Thy sons, O God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when Thou comest we shall be like Thee, for we shall see Thee as Thou art!

What wonder, then, if Prophets and Apostles, my brethren—yes, and our Lord Himself—should have exhausted all the poor and stinted resources of human language to paint the delights of the City of God! Eye has not seen them, ear has not heard them, the human mind has no ideas that answer to them, the imagination of man lacks the colours in which these glories are to be painted. These are “secret words which it is not granted to man to utter,”* and we must be caught up into Paradise with St. Paul before we can begin to take them in. A little while, and we shall know them; the night will pass, the day will break, the shadows flee away. Till then, let us feed ourselves on hope, and on such strains of that heavenly music, such rays of that divine light, as have found their way into the darkness and confusion of this our place of exile. Let us listen to such words as his with whom we began this evening, telling us of “the river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of that city, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more, but the throne of God and of the

* 2 Cor. xii. 4.

Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads; and night shall be no more, and they shall not need the light of the lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign for ever and ever."*

* Apoc. xxii. 1—5.

NOTE.

The opinion casually expressed at p. 68, that it would be allowable so to explain the Scriptural narrative of the Deluge as to leave room for the supposition that its universality related only to the human race and the parts of the earth inhabited by man, may seem to require some explanation. The reader is referred to an appendix to some articles which appeared some years ago, under the title "*Cosmogonia Naturale comparata col Genesi*," in the *Civiltà Cattolica* (vols. 50, 51, or Serie x., vols. 3, 4, 1862), and particularly to vol. 51, pp. 30—36 and 291 seq.—which will be found abundantly to justify the statement in the text.

THE
TEMPTATIONS OF OUR LORD.

FOUR SERMONS

BY THE
REV. FREDERICK HATHAWAY,
Of the Society of Jesus.

- I. REALITY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR LORD'S
TEMPTATIONS.
- II. THE FIRST TEMPTATION.
- III. THE SECOND TEMPTATION.
- IV. THE THIRD TEMPTATION.

SUMMARY.

SERMON I.

REALITY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR LORD'S TEMPTATIONS.

Et statim Spiritus expulit Eum in desertum. Et erat in deserto quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, et tentabatur a Satana; eratque cum bestiis, et Angeli ministrabant Ei.

Immediately the Spirit drove Him out into the desert. And He was in the desert forty days and forty nights, and was tempted by Satan; and He was with beasts, and Angels ministered to Him. (St. Mark i. 12, 13.)

THE subject of the present sermon is the reality and circumstances of our Lord's Temptations in general.

1. There can be no doubt that the facts recorded are literally true. This is quite in keeping with other tokens and effects of the reality of our Lord's human nature.
2. The time and place. After the Baptism, and before the Public Preaching. The desert between Bethel and Jericho was the scene.
3. St. Thomas' four reasons for our Lord's temptations.
4. They teach us in the first place to distinguish between temptation and sin.
5. Also to expect temptation when we set ourselves to serve God.
6. We are to be led by the Spirit, not to expose ourselves to temptation.
7. We are to prepare ourselves by watching and prayer.
8. Consolation in the fact that our Lord sympathises in our conflicts.
9. And in the assurance He gives us of victory.
10. Gratitude we shall feel for this consolation and instruction.

SERMON II.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION.

Et cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus, et quadraginta noctibus, postea esuriit. Et accedens tentator dixit ei: Si Filius Dei es, dic ut lapides isti panes fiunt. Qui respondens dixit: Scriptum est: Non in solo pane vivit homo, sed in omni verbo, quod procedit de ore Dei.

When He had fasted forty day and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry. And the tempter coming said to Him: If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Who answered and said: It is written, Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.

(St. Matt. iv. 2—4.)

1. WE are now to contemplate the first of the three special temptations recorded by the Evangelists, and our Lord's answer to it. Our Lord now allowed Himself to feel the full pangs of hunger. Satan

himself approached to the assault. Significance of the name "Satan," and of his description as the "tempter." He cannot prevail unless men consent. He probably approached our Lord, not under his own appearance, but under the figure of one of the Essenes living in the neighbourhood. The three particular temptations answer to the three concupiscences, and bear a resemblance to the inducements under which our first parents were led to sin.

2. The form of the temptation. Contrast between our Lord and Adam. Class of temptations of which this seems to be the type—temptations to some unauthorised mode of relieving some real or imaginary want. Sympathy we should feel for those under the more violent forms of the temptation. The homeless and famishing, or destitute poor—tempted to deny their faith, or sacrifice their virtue, for bread—Catholic prisoners and children in workhouse schools, and the like. Other forms of the same temptation in other classes. Artifice of the tempter in modifying his first proposal. Such temptations are often accompanied by suggestions of pride.

3. Our Lord's peremptory way of dealing with the temptation. The two interpretations of the passage quoted by him combine to make up a complete answer to all temptations of the class. God can support us in many different ways, and the alleged necessity for relief does not really exist.

SERMON III.

THE SECOND TEMPTATION.

Tunc assumpsit eum diabolus in sanctam civitatem, et statuit eum super pinnaculum templi, et dixit ei: Si Filius Dei es, mitte te deorsum. Scriptum est enim, Quia Angelis suis mandavit de te, et in manibus tollent te, ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum. Ait illi Jesus: Rursum scriptum est, Non tentabis Dominum Deum tuum.

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, and set Him upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him: If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, that He hath given His Angels charge over Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest perhaps Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said to him: It is written again, thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God.

(St. Matt. iv. 5—7.)

1. QUESTION as to the order of the temptations. St. Augustine's opinion. It is, however, better to suppose that St. Matthew gives the true order, not St. Luke. Probable reason of the change made by the latter Evangelist. Remark of St. Thomas. Connection between the first and second temptation.

2. Satan now tries to induce our Lord to rely on the divine protection in an unauthorised way. He also takes occasion to use Scripture in favour of his own suggestion.

3. Scene of the temptation. Our Lord allowing himself to be carried by the devil. The suggestion to presumption.

4. We must expect a victory over temptations like the first to be succeeded by temptations like the second, and to have texts of Scripture and sayings of holy men used for the purpose. Miserable effects of the misapplication of Scriptural passages. Various forms of the temp-

tation to presumption. Those who remain outside the Church meaning to submit at the last. Those who remain in mortal sin hoping to be reconciled to God on their death-bed. Three instances of God's judgment on such presumption. Other forms of the temptation.

5. Our Lord's answer to this suggestion of Satan.

SERMON IV.

THE THIRD TEMPTATION.

Iterum assumpsit eum diabolus in montem excelsum valde, et ostendit ei omnia regna mundi et gloriam eorum, et dixit ei: Hæc omnia tibi dabo, si cadens adoraveris me. Tunc dixit ei Jesus: Vade, Satana, scriptum est enim: Dominum Deum tuum adorabis, et illi soli servies. Tunc reliquit eum diabolus, et ecce Angeli accesserunt et ministrabant ei.

Again the devil took Him up into a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and said to Him: All these will I give Thee, if falling down Thou wilt adore me. Then Jesus said to him: Begone, Satan, for it is written, The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil left Him, and behold Angels came and ministered to Him.

(St. Matt. iv. 8—11.)

1. THE third temptation—very gross and palpable. The image of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them not merely a verbal description, but a visible representation.

2. Satan at the same time made an involuntary representation of his own insolence and audacity, and also of his own blindness and weakness. Falsehood of his claims as to the dominion of the world, though it had some foundation in fact.

3. We must prepare ourselves for this temptation also. The devil, when defeated, often stakes all on one desperate assault. Wide range of this class of temptations. To some few Satan actually offers the dominion of the world. Antichrist. Various other forms of the offer of a kingdom. Youth at a school—Men in various professions—Ladies in the world. The temptation universal. It extends even to those occupied in good works.

4. Our Lord's answer to the temptation.

5. Angels ministered to Him, and rejoice in our victories also.

SERMON I.

REALITY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR LORD'S TEMPTATIONS.

Et statim Spiritus expulit Eum in desertum. Et erat in deserto quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, et tentabatur a Satana; eratque cum bestiis, et Angeli ministrabant Ei.

Immediately the Spirit drove Him out into the desert. And He was in the desert forty days and forty nights, and was tempted by Satan; and He was with beasts, and Angels ministered to Him.

(Words taken from the 12th and 13th verses of the 1st chapter of St. Mark's Gospel.)

THE three first Evangelists have all recorded, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our Blessed Lord's retirement into the desert immediately after His Baptism, His forty days fast, and the fact, so awfully mysterious, and yet so full of luminous instruction, of His being tempted by the Evil One. I have repeated to you as my text St. Mark's account, because it is a short summary of the general facts; and I wish to call your attention this afternoon rather to the reality of our Lord's temptations, and to the circumstances under which they took place, and to suggest some practical lessons to ourselves from these things, leaving the particular specimens of temptation recorded by St. Matthew and St. Luke, and not by St. Mark, for the subjects of the three following Sunday afternoon instructions.

I. First then, my dear friends, I trust I may take

it for granted that you all feel too much reverence for the Inspired Word of God to make any difficulty of receiving all the facts recorded or implied as literally true. I need not argue before you either against the blasphemies of those who represent the mystery as nothing but a delusion of our Lord, when His nerves were weakened by long fasting and excited by the horrors of the solitude, or against the less offensive but equally groundless supposition, that all that took place was a spiritual representation akin to the visions of the Prophets and Saints. When Prophets saw things in visions, they are spoken of as visions. At other times they were taken from place to place, and saw things with their bodily eyes, and then it is so recorded. Here there is no ambiguity. "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, to be tempted."* "The Spirit drove Him out into the desert. And He was in the desert forty days and forty nights, and was tempted by Satan."† "Jesus, full of the Holy Ghost, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the desert, and was tempted by the devil."‡ He was really tempted—tempted by Satan in person. He permitted the most utterly accursed and most hideously loathsome of all creatures to approach Him, to stand close to Him, to remain with Him, to speak to Him, to touch Him, and to ply Him repeatedly with urgent suggestions of evil. He was tempted in all points like to ourselves, as really, as violently, only without sin. There could not be in Him the slightest approach to consent, or the faintest shadow of delectation; but all that is strictly meant by

* St. Matt. iv. 1. † St. Mark i. 12, 13. ‡ St. Luke iv. 1.

temptation, with all the anguish involved in it, our Blessed Lord really underwent. This thought alone might well furnish us with abundant matter for meditation. It is a fact that we could never have imagined. We should not have dared, if it had not been recorded, to infer it as a probable result from the completeness of the hypostatic union. Nay, now that it is recorded, our ears, as St. Gregory says, are ready to shudder at it, our mind recoils from realising it. We are ready to say, as St. Peter said of the Passion, "This be far from Thee, O Lord!"* But our Lord shrank not from actually enduring what we shrink from distinctly contemplating. And, amazing as the mystery really is, we see, on reflection, that it is in harmony with other tokens and effects of the reality and fulness of our Lord's human nature. He felt wonder, He felt alarm, He felt repugnance of will and desolation of heart. He allowed the ministers of Satan to outrage the dignity of His sacred Person in almost every possible way. We must bear then to believe that He endured the torture and degradation of being assaulted by Satan himself.

2. Next, as to the time and place of the mystery. It began immediately after the visible descent of the Holy Ghost and the voice from Heaven declaring our Lord to be the Only-begotten Son of God. "Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the desert." That display of glory, and those words of divine approbation, aroused afresh the suspicions and fury of hell. The Evil One set himself at once to put the Son of God to the test, and to find out if there were not

* St. Matt. xvi. 22.

some weak point in Him. And our Lord, on His part, as He had humbled Himself before His Baptism by mixing with the crowd of sinners waiting on the bank of the Jordan, was ready to humble Himself still more afterwards by taking wild beasts and evil spirits for His companions, so as to steep, as it were, that passing glory in special humiliations. Again, the mystery immediately preceded the commencement of the public ministry for which He had been set apart in His Baptism. Fasting and prayer, and solitude, and conflict with evil spirits, were His special preparations for going about to seek and to save the lost. The scene of the temptations was evidently a desert in the stricter sense of the term ; not what it sometimes denotes, an unenclosed and scantily-inhabited range of downs, but a barren solitude, with wild beasts—as St. Mark, with the little additional touch he often gives, relates—ranging through it. There are two opinions as to the particular desert indicated. Some writers of weight have argued that it must have been the great Arabian desert, in which both Moses and Elias had kept a fast of forty days, and which, they think, might appropriately be called, by way of eminence, “the desert.” But I see no reason for rejecting the more common opinion, which places the scene in the desolate region that stretches between Jericho and Bethel, not far from the Jordan ; or for doubting the truth of the local tradition, attested by the earliest travellers in Palestine, which has for so many centuries pointed out particular caves there as spots hallowed by our Lord’s presence during the forty

days. This desert bears the name of "Quarantana," from the number of days. It would naturally be spoken of as "the desert" to any one coming, as our Lord did, from the Jordan. It is described as a remarkably dreary and cheerless solitude, with great masses of rock rising out of barren sand, a high mountain in the midst towering over all. St. Matthew, in speaking of our Lord's leaving the Jordan, uses a word which would be literally rendered, "Was *led up*," an expression that could not properly be applied to the Great Desert, which was both to the south and on a lower level. Elias had dwelt in this desert near the Jordan also; and Eliseus, in mystical anticipation of our Lord, had changed bitter waters in it into sweet. Hither then our Saviour was led by a direct and vehement impulse of the Holy Spirit, to which He rendered prompt and willing obedience. He remained here alone, without eating or drinking, surrounded by wild beasts and evil spirits, and apparently exposed during the whole time to their assaults, although three temptations only, which He encountered at the end of the forty days, are recorded as specimens for our instruction.

3. St. Thomas, following the early Fathers, teaches that four great objects were accomplished by our Lord in this mystery. He was tempted, in order to warn us to expect temptations; He went before in this, as in other things, to show us where we must follow Him. He was tempted, in order to conquer for us and to make us conquerors; He merited for us in His own conflicts all the graces that we need in the hour of our own—special graces

for every form and variety of temptation. He was tempted, in order to give us the consolation of knowing that He suffered all that we suffer, and can sympathise with us in all our struggles. And he was tempted, in order to leave us lessons of instruction as to the proper manner of resisting assaults and securing victory.

4. Now, then, having reminded you of the reality of our Lord's temptations, and having noticed some of the chief circumstances attending them, and the chief objects fulfilled in them, let me ask you to ponder attentively a few of the solemn lessons which we ought to learn from the mystery. And first, we are very emphatically taught to distinguish between sin and temptation to sin. There is no lesson that we more need to have frequently inculcated. Sometimes we need it for our encouragement, sometimes for our warning, and to stop our mouths from false excuses. The All-Holy One, who is necessarily incapable of any taint of sin, was really tempted, seriously, violently tempted. Nothing can show us more plainly that there is no necessary connection between temptation and sin. There may be torrents of blasphemies, floods of evil thoughts and dangerous imaginations, surging in upon the soul—blinding it, stunning it, bewildering it, torturing it, and yet no sin at all, only suffering, suffering that may be most precious, because like our Lord's own. Our enemy would have us believe that, just because his assaults have been unusually violent, we must have been defeated; that we are already taken captive, and must let him shut us up in the iron cage of despair;

or, again, that we can never maintain the purity, which the vividness of temptation seems to have already tarnished, and that we may as well therefore console ourselves with the husks of earthly consolations. No! a thousand times, no! He, Who is Infinite Holiness, was tempted. Fighting is not falling. And if I have at all fallen, I repent, and humble myself, and will begin to fight again. On the other hand, when we have really fallen into sin through temptation, we need a clear perception of the difference between the two things, to shut our ears resolutely to the lying whisper that we could not help falling. What miserable folly of self-excusing comes from this confusion! What risk to the essential integrity of our contrition! What loss of fervour and intensity of sorrow in it! If the temptation has been ever so violent, the sin that has resulted from it is no necessary result. It is not simply the result of temptation, but the result of neglect of prayer, or neglect of watchfulness, or cowardice and sloth under temptation.

5. Next, we are reminded of the warning: "My son, when thou settest thyself to serve God, stand in justice and fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation."* We also, in our baptism, were declared to be the well-beloved sons of God, and were made what we were declared to be. As soon as we are old enough to be capable of sin, our Father's enemy and our own begins to test our faithfulness, and to try to lead us to disinherit ourselves. He never slumbers, and we are warned that we must be ever

* Eccclus. ii. 1.

sober and vigilant, and ready for his attacks. The whole life of man is a warfare. Our Lord is led from His baptism into the desert to be tempted, in order to be a sign to us, and to make the assaults of the Evil One on Himself a warning to us. The malignant spirit, who, after watching our Lord's sinless life, and after seeing the fiery dove descend upon Him, and hearing the voice from Heaven, was bold enough to attack Him; and who, again and again defeated, returned with fresh temptations, and when at last put to flight, retired only for a season—will certainly not refrain from attacking us, nor even long cease to attack us, until we are beyond his reach. No desert, however solitary, will offer any escape from him. He is "the prince of the power of this air."* Wherever there is air to breathe, he can penetrate also. No sanctuary so sacred, no presence so awful, but he can intrude. No work so holy, but he will try to mar it. Special favours, light from Heaven, and divine consolations, will be signals for special temptations. To begin any good work for God, is to challenge Goliath to single combat. Our Lord promises us eternal rest and an eternal crown after victory, and grace to gain the victory through conflict, but not ease or repose until the conflict is over and the victory gained. We have to wrestle "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places."† "Your adversary, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour."‡

* Ephes. ii. 2. † Ephes. vi. 12. ‡ 1 St. Peter v. 8.

6. While we are bid to expect temptation, we are forbidden to expose ourselves to it without necessity. We are to be led into the desert to be tempted. On the one hand, we must not shrink from the guidance of God's providence. They that are the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God. We must not abandon meditation because it lays us open to distractions and bad thoughts, nor shrink from a good work because, as soon as we begin it, we are sure to be infested with temptations to vain-glory or rash judgments or irritation, nor neglect a social duty because it seems to plunge us into an atmosphere of worldliness. On the other hand, we must not tempt God by expecting to be upheld when we go of our own accord into danger. "He that loveth danger shall perish in it."* Let the devil meet us in a desert into which God has led us, and we need not fear. But God does not promise to give the graces that will secure victory if we forfeit them by going in our own spirit, and not under the guidance of His Spirit, into places where our enemy has power.

7. We must not only expect temptation, but prepare for it. Our Lord in this mystery is saying to us, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation"—that is, are not submerged by it. He, Who could have blasted the Evil One afresh and hurled him into closer confinement in the abyss, chose to meet him as man. He, Who needed no arms and no armour, chose for our instruction to prepare Himself, as for His work, so for temptation.

* Ecclus. iii. 27.

Retirement from the world and worldly things, as far as duty permits—prayer, watchfulness, fasting—are to be our preparation, that we may not be found by the enemy at a disadvantage. Of the way of resisting particular assaults our Lord speaks to us in the record of those separate temptations, which we are to consider hereafter. But to-day He speaks to us of the necessity of habitual preparation, habitual watchfulness, habitual prayer. As He does not promise victory to those who rush uncalled into temptation, so neither to those who encounter even unavoidable temptation unprepared. “Stand in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation.”

8. Let us treasure up afresh the consoling assurance, that our Lord sympathises with us in all our conflicts. As He knows by His own experience hunger and thirst, weariness and exhaustion, and the sensations of a body racked in every joint, bleeding from every vein, and quivering with torture in every nerve—as He knows friendlessness and terror, and desolation of spirit, so He knows by personal experience the shame and pain of exposure to temptation and conflict with evil. He enters into our feelings, and feels for us. We must drink of this part of His chalice, as well as of the others. But He will temper the draught, and support us while we are drinking.

9. So, also, let us fix again in our minds the assurance that He gives us in this mystery of victory. He was led into the desert to fight and conquer for us. It was in our nature that He was assaulted. It was against such feelings and emotions as ours, as far as they are simply human and not sinful, that

the batteries of Satan were directed in His Person. During those forty days and forty nights of anguish He secured victory for each one of us, and under every possible variety and combination of temptation. The evil spirits come to us with an air of triumph, and an assumed certainty of victory, but they are in reality already beaten and baffled. They have been defeated in anticipation of this very struggle, and the arms with which we can conquer them are ready at hand and blessed for our use. "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you."* "My grace is sufficient for thee."† Sufficient for thee in the very moment when the desert is most gloomy and the anguish greatest, and the foe most overbearing, and the hurricane of evil thoughts most bewildering; sufficient for thee if only thou wilt firmly to avail thyself of it.

10. Lastly, my dear friends, let us excite ourselves to a lively gratitude for the consolation and instruction that our Blessed Lord gives us, and the graces that He earned for us in this mystery of His temptation, by thinking what it cost Him. Whenever He goes before us, it is always with bleeding feet. Let us try to picture to ourselves our Divine Master in that savage desert. He has all our human feelings, though He is God, blessed for ever. The sun's rays beat violently on His Head by day, and the heat reflected from the rocks around and the sand beneath scorches Him like a furnace; the rough blasts from the mountain, the heavy dews and the damp drip of the cave, chill Him through the night; He is

St. James iv. 7.

† 2 Cor. xii. 9.

wasted by hunger, parched by thirst, sleepless and exhausted ; wild beasts roar around Him ; evil spirits in a thousand hideous forms afflict His sight. These things we can faintly imagine ; but, oh, you that think you love Him, what seems to you the degradation to the All-Holy One of the presence and touch of the prince of darkness, and the torture to the Sacred Heart of instigations to sin ? To mere men, who were supernaturally enlightened with some sense of the majesty of God and the malice of rebellion against Him, an evil thought has been worse than the rack. St. Stanislaus fainted away at a foul word. St. Francis Regis when a child was made seriously ill by the description of a mortal sin. St. Francis Xavier even in sleep was in such agony at the suggestion of evil that blood gushed from him. What was it to the Infinitely Holy to be beset and compassed by temptation, to be spoken to, and touched, and carried hither and thither by the very personification of all evil ? God Incarnate in the hands of Satan ! Let us try to rouse our dull minds to some warmth of gratitude for light and strength purchased for us at such a price, and to some strenuous determination to fight by that light and with that strength !

SERMON II.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION.

Et cū jejunasset quadraginta diebus, et quadraginta noctibus, postea esuriit. Et accedens tentator dixit se: Si Filius Dei es, dic ut lapides isti panes fiant. Qui respondens dixit: Scriptum est: Non in solo pane vivit homo, sed in omni verbo, quod procedit de ore Dei.

When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry. And the tempter coming said to Him: If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Who answered and said: It is written, Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.

(Words taken from the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th verses of the 4th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.)

I. LET us implore the Holy Spirit, by whom our Lord was led out into the desert to be assaulted for our sakes, to lead us now onwards and upwards, and enable us to gaze on this awful conflict with reverence and devout attention, that we may gain spiritual profit from the spectacle. When Goliath challenged the mightiest of the Jewish army to single combat, and David accepted the challenge in the name of the living God, the embattled hosts on either side stood looking on in breathless silence. And so now, doubtless, all the armies of Heaven on one side, and all the powers of hell on the other, were intently watching this combat between the King of Glory and the prince of darkness. Let us apply ourselves also to watch it. Our business this afternoon is to learn.

what we can from the account of Satan's approach at the end of the forty days, and then to study the first of the three special temptations, and our Lord's answer to it.

We fix our eyes then on our Lord in the desert, where He has been doing penance for us for forty days and forty nights, in fasting, watching, and praying, amidst the gloom of a dreary waste, surrounded by wild beasts, and assaulted by evil spirits more savage than any beast. Adam had been tempted in a paradise of delights; he had fallen, and had been cast out, and we with him, and the world had become a desert. Our Lord, the second Adam, is attacked in a dreary desert, that, conquering for us, He may bring us back into a brighter Paradise than that from which we were banished. A twofold change in the combatants at the end of the forty days is indicated briefly, as is their wont, but with sufficient clearness, both by St. Matthew and by St. Luke, when they proceed to record the three particular temptations that the Holy Spirit has selected for our study. "Afterwards He was hungry."* "When these days were ended, He was hungry."† During the forty days the natural effects of prolonged abstinence from all food had been restrained; but now our Lord gave Himself to feel them without any mitigation. His sacred Body was ravaged by the fierce pains of starvation, and reduced to a state of visible exhaustion. Then the tempter came to Him. Before this the devil had fought, as it were, from a distance, discharging fiery darts, and sending

* St. Matt. iv. 2.

† St. Luke iv. 2.

subordinate evil spirits to the assault. Now he came in person, and came close, as to a hand-to-hand encounter.

The name given to him also deserves notice—"the tempter." He is called in different parts of this narration "the devil" and "Satan." He is the devil, or accuser. He accuses God to man, misrepresenting our loving Father as a harsh master, arbitrarily debarring us from reasonable gratifications; when he has led men into sin, he accuses them to their own conscience, to make them despair; and when they die in sin, he accompanies them to the judgment seat, to accuse them there, and urge the infliction of punishment. He is Satan, the adversary, the great enemy of God and of man: "Your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion." When noxious weeds have been oversown upon God's good seed, the explanation given is: "The enemy has done it."* The name of the tempter, which St. Matthew uses here, expresses the way in which he carries on his double work of enmity and mischief-making, and the limits within which he is confined. He cannot of himself produce evil; he cannot of himself do harm. He has no power over the will. He cannot enter the soul, except when and so far as the soul itself gives him admission. Our Lord stands without and knocks, and, if any man will open to the Divine Guest, enters in. And Satan also stands without, and tries to cajole us into opening the door to him. It is only so far as he finds the sanctuary of our heart empty and prepared for him that he can take possession of

* Matt. xiii. 28.

it. It is only while men sleep that he oversows his cockle among the wheat. Evil spirits have sometimes been permitted by God to take and keep forcible possession of men's bodies—never of their souls; that terrible domination over the affections of the soul, of which the degradation and sufferings of demoniacs were an apt token, is the effect of the soul's voluntary surrender of itself.

“The tempter coming said to Him.” He came not under his own appearance, though in his own person. For the most part, and almost always at the beginning, the devil disguises himself, and tries to insinuate his poison into the soul under the semblance, and with some mixture, of truth. When he has gained a thorough mastery by a long course of sin on the part of his slave, he sometimes, as it were, in the wantonness of triumph, shows himself openly, that the guilt of his wretched victim may be more definitively malignant. And again, when he has been repeatedly baffled, as in these temptations of our Lord, he is often driven, in a sort of despairing rage, to cast aside his disguise before he retires howling from the contest. On this occasion he probably took the appearance of one of the Essenes, who lived a sort of hermit life in the neighbourhood at the time, and came forward with demonstrations of reverence for our Lord and admiration of His holiness, mingled with sympathy for His sufferings, and a desire that He should not carry His severity to excess. Our Blessed Lord, again, is under a disguise. He does not display any signs of His divine nature, and does not employ His divine power

in the contest. He meets each temptation as man, and fights with the weapons that are given to man, and which He instructs us to wield after His example.

The three particular temptations answer evidently to the three different classes of suggestions addressed to the three concupiscences—to the desire of the flesh, the cravings of our bodily organisation and of the lower parts of our spiritual nature; the desire of the eyes, the tendency to covet the possession of outward things; and the pride of life, the spirit of self-exaltation and presumption. We notice also, of course, a resemblance between the inducements to disobedience which proved successful with our first parents, and those which our Divine Master permits to be urged upon Himself, that He may teach us how to repel the like. But I pass over much that suggests itself on these points, in order to proceed to the particular temptation which we are to consider to-day.

2. The tempter coming said to Him: "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread," or, more literally, "loaves." It is not intended by the Evangelist that we should suppose that this was all the tempter said. The mere fact that in St. Luke's account the expression given is—"That *this stone* be made bread," would remind us of the plan followed in these sacred narratives of selecting a few facts and circumstances from among many of which they are specimens, and, in like manner, some sentence or sentences from the discourse or speech of which they form part; sometimes

the same with what are given in one of the other Gospels, but more often different, though connected with them. We are left to fill up the picture, and to supply the context. We may imagine then that, while our Lord is suffering intense anguish from hunger and thirst, is visibly exhausted, and is waiting patiently for the proper time of relieving His bodily wants, one who seems to be a venerable hermit approaches, and bowing reverently, congratulates Him on having equalled the severe fasts of Moses and Elias, and then proceeds to suggest that it is time to have mercy upon Himself, and that if He is, as He appears to be, the Son of God, Whom the Jews were expecting as their Deliverer, He may very seasonably use the power that God has given Him, to supply Himself with the food that He so greatly needs, by turning some, or at least one, of a heap of stones before Him into bread.

We can hardly forbear from noticing here again the contrast, along with resemblance, between this temptation of our Lord and that to which Adam succumbed. He was lavishly supplied with everything that was needed to make life enjoyable, and yet yielded to the suggestion to gratify an inordinate craving after the single gratification that had been forbidden. Our Lord, on the contrary, is in utter destitution and extreme pain; and all that the tempter asks him to do is to forestal the appointed moment of relief, and to use the power that he undoubtedly possessed to procure, not a forbidden luxury, but the simplest and most necessary food. As in his sufferings and humiliations He descended

to a far lower depth than any to which He actually calls us to follow Him, so, in these temptations, He permitted the assaults to be made upon Him with greater violence than that which is permitted to the enemy in his corresponding attacks upon ourselves.

And now, as before, in thinking generally of the reality of our Lord's temptations, we were reminded of the fact of our own life being one long warfare, and of the necessity of constant readiness for attack, so, from this particular temptation, let us learn to be on our guard against a vast class of temptations of which it is a type, ranging from suggestions of the most grievous and deadly guilt to inducements to imperfections and infidelities, but marked by this common character, that an unauthorised mode of relieving some real or imaginary want, or escaping from the pressure of some pain, is the thing proposed to us. We are famished in body and in mind ; we crave relief, and fancy we have a right to crave it ; and the tempter brings us stones to become food for our craving. One fruit from the contemplation of our Lord under this assault ought to be an increased sympathy for those who are exposed to the more violent forms of the temptation, and increased earnestness in praying for them, that they may be strengthened to suffer to the end, rather than escape suffering by sin. Ah ! my dear friends, we, who are often ready, like our first parents, to crave some forbidden gratification, although furnished with all the necessities and most of the comforts of life, what should we do, if the tempter found us, as he finds multitudes, homeless and famine-stricken.

and exhausted, with no apparent alternative but to sin or to starve? Compassionate and pray for starving mothers with starving children, who are tempted to deny their faith for Protestant alms; for servant girls out of place, because they are too awkward for fashionable Catholics, and too conscientious for bigoted Protestants, to whom the tempter is offering food and clothes and shelter at the price of their virtue; for those who have been standing all day in the streets, and on their way back, cold and hungry, to fireless garrets or damp cellars, are urged to snatch a short forgetfulness of their misery by intoxication; for homeless outcasts, to whom the evil one whispers the more frightful suggestion that a plunge into the river will end an existence than which no other can be more intolerable; for prisoners pining on bread and water in solitary cells, and not supported by a Priest's cheering words or the strength of the sacraments, who are offered milder treatment if they will only lay aside the odious name of Catholic; and, most of all, for children in the far worse prisons of workhouse schools, who would need as much heroic courage as if they were the slaves of fanatical Mahometans, to keep their faith and virtue against the ill-treatment to which they are exposed. But although as yet we have never been subjected to trials so fierce as these, there are not long wanting suggestions of evil of the same general character. When we are tired and jaded, or when we are afraid of the ridicule of the unscrupulous, we may be tempted to break the laws of fasting or abstinence, or to take more wine than we ought, or otherwise to exceed in the

pleasures of the table. Or we are depressed, and crave consolation, and novel-reading or gambling, or resort to dangerous places of amusement, is proposed as the relief. Or we are lonely, and want sympathy, and some dangerous companion comes in our way—a generous, open-hearted college friend, or an intellectual associate of kindred tastes, but one who will sneer at our piety or undermine our faith, or lead us into sinful expence; or a fascinating female acquaintance, who cannot lawfully or suitably become our wife, but in whose company it is very pleasant, while very wrong, needlessly to linger. Or we are given to philosophical and scientific investigation, and we come to the verge of something that we know is forbidden, and we are urged to go a little farther, and meddle with stones that look like loaves, and which we think we can turn into nourishing food. Or our political advancement, and all the opportunities for doing good that we fancy to be involved in it will be shipwrecked, if we will not consent to take some view of public questions that calls itself more liberal than the voice of conscience or the voice of the Holy See. Or we are in imminent danger of sinking below our former position in society, and we can only maintain or retrieve our prospects by some rash speculation, or by following the practice of our fellow-traders or professional brethren where it is opposed to the divine law. Or we have children about to be launched into the world, and it seems as if we could not ensure a successful career for our sons except by placing them at a Protestant college, nor get our daughters off our

hands except by shutting our eyes to various things which a delicate conscience would declare to be highly objectionable. Or we have been teased and harassed by the perpetual incursion of dangerous imaginations, and fatigued by the effort of resisting them, and it is strongly suggested to us that, if we fully indulged just one of them, we should escape the burden of a long, wearying, and perhaps, after all, unsuccessful contest. And in the intervals of these temptations to greater guilt, there are constantly recurring occasions on which we are urged to smaller faults of sloth or neglect of domestic duty, or participation in improper conversation, or to falsehoods of excuse, or to escape from some passing embarrassment. In our spiritual exercises we are tempted to negligence or irreverence, or the abandonment of prayer in times of desolation, or to a self-willed grasping at consolation, or to disobedience of our Director in our management of ourselves, or to reading above, and therefore dangerous to, our state, or to frequent and needless dispensations from the Rule that we profess to follow. In all these and many other similar temptations, though the variety both of species and degree is immensely great, the common feature is, that the tempter detects, or thinks he detects, some craving, and his object is to get us to take for granted that relief is absolutely necessary, and then to offer us some sinful or irregular means of obtaining it.

We may remark farther, that, as with our Lord the tempter proposed first several stones, and then a single one, to be turned into food, so with us he

will often try to succeed by moderating his first proposal. If not all that would be very desirable, at least a little—one more glass of wine, one more dangerous visit, five minutes only of extra indulgence in bed, or improper reading, one little fraud, one falsehood, one curious look, one trifling with an impure imagination or a train of thought contrary to the faith.

Again, as with our Lord even in this temptation, which was directly addressed to His bodily necessities, the devil added a suggestion of pride—"If Thou be the Son of God," so very often he makes a similar combination of motives in assaulting us. He fell by pride himself, and he has so much confidence in insinuations of pride that he seldom omits to introduce them even in temptations of a different class. "Such a gratification would not do *me* the harm that it would to others." "With my general habits of temperance, I may indulge a little more freely just now." "With my clear head and strong faith I may venture on dangerous reading or companionship."

3. Mark then, my dear friends, in the last place, our Lord's way of dealing with such temptations. Remember, it was for our sakes that He permitted Himself to be thus assaulted, and the Holy Spirit has recorded His answer for our study and imitation. Remark how promptly He rejects the suggestion, how precise and peremptory is His tone, and how completely He cuts away the ground of the false principles that are insinuated. He teaches us by His example to be quick, vigorous, and determined

in repelling suggestions of evil ; not to parley with them ; not to enter into any discussion. There is to be no faltering, nothing of Eve's "lest perhaps," no looking to see out of curiosity what the temptation has to say for itself. If we begin to negotiate we are almost sure to fall. We are to take "the shield of faith," by which we can extinguish all the fiery darts of the Evil One ; or rather, we ought to have taken it, as we are bid to do, and be in readiness to repel on the instant each of the devil's missiles as it approaches the soul. And the same prompt act of the will that holds up the shield of faith is to thrust with "the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God." "It is written." God has decreed quite otherwise. So, stopping our excuses the while, we are to answer quickly. "It is written : Not in bread alone does man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." There are two interpretations of these words ; and I think that, as in other cases where there are two interpretations that do not clash, but rather support each other, both are intended, and the two together make up the complete answer to all temptations, of whatever kind, that propose an unauthorised manner of seeking relief from a real or fancied necessity. Man's life, and whatever it is good for man to have, can be supported in other ways. Bread seems absolutely necessary for life ; but if life is really best for us, God can and will preserve it in other ways. He will sustain it by His mere word, as He did for Moses and Elias ; or He will rain down manna from Heaven ; or He will send Angels to our assistance, or bid the ravens bring

us food. "Our God, Whom we worship, is able to save us from the furnace of burning fire,"* and we need not and will not sin to escape being cast into it. So we may say of every want, bodily, intellectual, or social, If it is really for His glory and my good that this necessity should be supplied, or that I should be delivered from this distress, God has His own way of doing it. By any appointment that He is pleased to make can man live, and not merely by the unauthorised means suggested by Satan. But again, and still more directly, we are to repel the temptation by denying the necessity for relief, which the tempter tries to get us to take for granted. "I must live;" "I cannot starve;" "I cannot endure this misery;" "I must extricate myself from this shame, from this downfall." There is no such necessity. Man's true life is not earthly and temporal—it is the life of grace and of obedience to the will of God. To fulfil every word that God speaks to us, and to be united to Him through the Word Incarnate, this is our life, the only life that is worth anxious thought, and to sin is to destroy this life. May He who teaches us how to answer give us firmness in answering!

* Dan. iii. 17.

SERMON III.

THE SECOND TEMPTATION.

Tunc assumpsit eum diabolus in sanctam civitatem, et statuit eum super pinnaculum templi, et dixit ei: Si Filius Dei es, mitte te deorsum. Scriptum est enim, Quia Angelis suis mandavit de te, et in manibus tollent te, ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum. Ait illi Jesus: Rursum scriptum est, Non tentabis Dominum Deum tuum.

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, and set Him upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him: If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, that He hath given His Angels charge over Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest perhaps Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said to him: It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

(Words taken from the 5th, 6th, and 7th verses of the 4th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.)

1. IN St. Luke's account of the mystery that we are studying, the order of the second and third temptations is different from that followed by St. Matthew; the offer of universal empire is related next to the suggestion to turn stones into bread, and the temptation to presumption, which we are about to consider this afternoon, is mentioned last. If it were not for my reverence for St. Augustine, who has chanced to speak as if it were really otherwise, I should have thought it so plain that St. Matthew follows the actual order of time, as not to need a word of remark in taking it for granted. The notes of sequence which he inserts, while there are none such in St. Luke, seems to make this quite evident. "Then

the devil took Him up into the holy city." "*Again* the devil took Him up into a very high mountain." "Then the devil left Him." Whereas St. Luke only says: "And the devil took Him to a high mountain." "And he brought Him to Jerusalem." "When all the temptation was ended, the devil left Him."*

As far as I know, no other commentator of much authority expresses a doubt as to St. Matthew's order being that of time. It is remarkable that St. Ambrose, in a course of homilies on St. Luke's Gospel, though following the text of St. Luke, changes the order for that of St. Matthew without making a remark on the difference, as if every one would understand the reason. It is not strange that in the compass of a vast variety of works, we should find an ill-considered expression even from St. Augustine, especially when it does not bear upon the object that he has in view. Both St. Matthew and St. Luke frequently relate events and sayings of our Lord out of the order of time, either to collect together what happened on different occasions in the same place, or on account of some connection of the subject-matter. Sometimes, as in the history before us, one of the two follows this plan, while the other inserts expressions marking the order of time; in other cases, where they both abandon it, it is supplied by St. Mark or St. John. It was probably in St. Luke's mind to relate first the assaults made on our Lord in the same desert region, and afterwards that which was the only one made in a different place. And for the purpose of meditation,

* Compare St. Matt. iv. 3—11 and St. Luke iv. 2—13.

it might sometimes be profitable, if we had succeeded in impressing our imagination somewhat vividly with the composition of place, to finish contemplating our Lord in the desert before we followed Him to Jerusalem. Again, it is a useful remark of St. Thomas, that the Evangelists may have adopted different orders in relating these temptations for the sake of reminding us that solicitations to vainglory and presumption sometimes precede, and sometimes follow, those to covetousness and ambition. To induce a strong habit of pride is often, of course, the culminating object of temptations to worldliness, and therefore St. John places "pride of life" after the two other concupiscences; and St. Ignatius, in the "Meditation of the Two Standards," proposes this as the third task of Satan's emissaries. St. Augustine's other assertion, that it is of no importance which of the two latter temptations really came first, is, of course, quite true in the sense in which he makes it—that is, that no argument can be drawn from the difference against the truth of the inspired narratives, inasmuch as there is no real discrepancy. But it is not without importance for our purpose, while we are studying the tactics of the devil in attacking, as well as the manner in which our Divine Teacher directs us to repel his attacks, to insist on the real order of these temptations, in order to see the connection between them. And the connection is especially noticeable and interesting between the first, which we considered last Sunday, and this, which we have agreed was certainly the second, and which we consider to-day.

2. Observe then how this second temptation contrasts with the first, and yet springs out of it; and how the devil lays a train in one for the other, and uses his overthrow in one to urge the other. While assaulting our Lord directly through His bodily weakness and distress with the suggestion to employ an inordinate method of relief, the tempter, as we noticed before, had insinuated also an incentive to presumption. "If Thou be the Son of God." Our Lord had taken no notice of that insinuation. He did not choose to give the enemy any insight into His character; and He met that, as each of the temptations, as man, and exactly in the way in which He would have us encounter similar assaults. The tempter then, finding himself baffled in his attempt to prevail through our Lord's appetite, and uncertain whether or not the other suggestion had been admitted, now proceeds to urge that more strongly, and to make it the weapon of a direct attack. As he found our Lord persisted in waiting for relief from His Father, instead of exerting His own miraculous power to procure it, he now tries to induce Him to rely on the divine protection in an unauthorised way, and so incur the guilt of presumption. And as our Lord had quoted Holy Scripture for His answer, He now takes occasion from this to argue from Scripture also in support of his own suggestion.

3. Let us proceed to consider this second temptation a little more closely, and afterwards take warning from it for ourselves. "The devil took Him up into the holy city"—that is Jerusalem, which is so called.

by the Prophet Isaias when deploring its unholy state, and which in later times, as we find from the writings of Josephus and Philo, was ordinarily designated by that name. We cannot spare time for reflections that might otherwise well engage our attention on the meaning of this epithet, and on the sad contrast between the august titles and high privileges of this chosen city and the present state of its inhabitants. But we are reminded by the scene of this second temptation, the temple in the holy city, that the tempter will accompany us everywhere, and will ply us with evil thoughts as well in the most sacred places as in the solitude of a desert. The devil "took Him" and "set Him upon the pinnacle of the temple." Our Lord permitted Himself to be carried; He was not persuaded to accompany the Evil One, but He yielded to a force which, if He had been mere man, He could not have resisted, to warn us again not to go a step into temptation voluntarily, and to show us also that even if evil spirits had dominion over our bodies, they would not thereby gain any power to taint our souls with sin, and that by the power of divine grace we might remain, as He remained, perfectly pure even in their hands. The transference to the temple was probably effected almost instantaneously by the mighty power which the Evil One felt himself on this occasion permitted to put forth; and then, transforming himself as far as he could into the appearance of an angel of light, he placed himself beside our Lord on what is called "the pinnacle." We do not know for certain what part of the building this was. The

most probable opinion is, that by the expression "the pinnacle," which evidently points to some particular and well-known elevation, the summit of Solomon's portico is meant, which rose from the edge of a precipice of four hundred feet of perpendicular height to a height of another hundred feet. From the ridge on the top he tried now to induce our Lord, as he did afterwards induce to his utter destruction Simon Magus, to cast himself down. "The solitary wilderness," he would urge, "was not the place for displaying your power. But here, in the centre of the holy city, and with multitudes around who are prepared to accept you for their leader, but desire some further sign, here is the fitting opportunity for proving yourself to be the Son of God. You have relied on divine providence to support your life without food, rely upon it boldly now. You appeal to Holy Scripture; remember that promise in it that Angels are ready to bear up your Body, so that you shall not even dash your foot against a stone. Cast yourself down fearlessly, and win the homage of all your countrymen."

4 We too, my dear friends, must expect to be tempted to many sins of vainglory and presumption, as well as to sinful gratifications and sinful attempts to extricate ourselves from difficulties. We must expect these different sorts of temptation to succeed each other, to be combined together, and to be contrasted with each other. We must expect even a victory over one to be turned into an occasion and corroboration of the other. We must expect known truths, divine promises, passages of Holy Scripture,

sayings of Saints, to be dexterously woven into a tissue of temptation. As no place is too holy for the intrusion of the tempter, so no truth is too holy to be pressed into his service. I do not see any reason for accusing him, as some do, of misquoting the passage from the 90th Psalm. It was a Psalm too well known for him to think that advisable, but he profaned it by trying to pervert it to a bad purpose. It is a Psalm full of assurances of the divine protection; and, whether or not it could be properly applied to our Lord even in His human nature, it was certainly intended for every faithful servant of God and eminent Saint, such as the devil might suppose our Lord to be. The promises in it have always been highly prized by Christians. It forms part of the daily closing service of the Church, and some of the very words quoted by Satan occur at least three times every day in the divine office during Lent. The malice of Satan lay in trying to turn a promise of divine protection into a reason for indulging in presumption by an unauthorised reliance on that protection. Although he does sometimes employ the weapon of misquotation, his most favourite as most dangerous perversion of Holy Scripture is by misinterpretation and misapplication. His attempt, by one of the most unscrupulous secretaries that he has ever had upon earth, to corrupt the text of Scripture, has not done a millionth part of the mischief that he has affected by misapplications of true and edifying passages, such as: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;"*

* Acts xvi. 31.

or, "By grace we are saved through faith."* Let us especially beware of the tempter when he transforms himself into an angel of light, and quotes Scripture, or the Fathers, or the Saints, for the purpose of inciting to rashness, or presumption, or false security; especially beware, when we have some self-complacent consciousness of victory lately gained over the flesh; most of all, especially beware when we are standing on some pinnacle, the height of which has already made us begin to feel giddy. Woe to us indeed if we have gone up of our own choice to a height whither no duty called us, when we have so often been told: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not;"† "Sit down in the lowest place;" "He that exalteth himself shall be abased."‡ But even if our advancement is not of our own seeking, but God's appointment, or the permitted success of our enemy's plots, let us be especially on our guard, for he will be sure to be standing there beside us. And not only when we happen to be on a pinnacle, but always and everywhere, some form of this temptation will be recurring. It is the favourite snare of the Evil One, because it is the most successful. There is hardly any extravagance of presumption, and presumptuous reliance on God's protection, into which he has not seduced multitudes of vainglorious men. Men have literally cast themselves from precipices and into abysses, and have gone into fire and water, fancying to the last that the miracle which they chose to expect would be worked in their behalf. Millions of men have

* Eph. ii. 8. † Jer. xlv. 5. ‡ St. Luke xiv. 10, 12.

flung themselves by their own act into God's judgment-hall, and upon their eternal destiny, in a false reliance upon His mercy. Multitudes have acted even professedly, and greater multitudes more or less confusedly on the blasphemous principle, to which St. Paul could not refer without a cry of horror—"Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound."* That most portentous of Satan's inventions—that believers are justified without sanctification, and that sin in the Elect does not interfere with God's favour, even to the outrageous impiety of Luther's "Sin boldly," or of what I have myself heard from a pulpit of the so-called Church of England, "Sin away, believer, if you can"—has really been heartily embraced by many; and though there are, perhaps, few now who would not shrink from the verbal expression of it in its full deformity, there are even yet great multitudes that have imbibed more or less of its poison, and are content to be deluded by it. Again, is there not reason to fear that there are men, who have plainly acknowledged to themselves that the body of the Faithful in union with the See of St. Peter is the One true Church, out of which there is no salvation, and yet desperately stake their prospect of Heaven on the hope that God, Whom they intend to go on disobeying all through life, will give them an opportunity of being received into the ark when death is at hand, and there is no sacrifice of worldly interests to be made? Nay—what would be still more incredible, if it were not unfortunately a fact—there are not wanting many instances of the same extreme

* Romans viii. 19.

degree of presumption among those who are within the fold ; instances of Catholics who know that they are in a state of mortal sin, and know that the penalty of one mortal sin is everlasting misery, and who dare to defy God by perverting His promises of mercy to the penitent sinner into a reason for delaying their repentance till the time when death is about to stop their course of sin and usher them suddenly into the presence of the Judge.

Not very long ago it happened to me to have three different instances of this terrible presumption, and of the terrible results of it, brought under my observation almost at the same time. A Protestant lady, whom I had known intimately, and with whose convictions of the truth of the Catholic faith I was well acquainted, and who, as I feared, was putting off the duty of submission to the Church, from reluctance to pain her husband, who was excessively fond of her—was suddenly struck in the full bloom of health with mortal disease, and died after a few hours of stupor, without having had a moment's lucid interval, or any knowledge of her danger. Not long after I received the news of this death, I had to pass through a prison infirmary, where a Catholic prisoner, who had registered herself as a Protestant, with the avowed determination of resuming the practice of her religion as soon as she should be free, and in the avowed confidence that God would never let her die without a Priest—was lying on her death-bed, without the chance of being permitted to speak to me, and her look of anguish, when she saw me pass by, was such as could never be forgotten. About the same time—

also, a Catholic whom I had frequently attended at his own house in illness, and who had neglected the means of grace after recovering his health, in the presumptuous expectation that he would be sure to set everything right before death, was visited by an attack of disease not apparently serious, and sent for me as before ; and he just lived till I reached his bedroom door, and then the death-rattle, that I had heard even on the stairs, was succeeded by his departure without absolution into eternity.

These are instances of extreme degrees of presumption. But in numberless ways, and under many different varieties of form, the same sort of snare is constantly laid for us. We are tempted to expose our bodily lives to risk without any call of duty ; to injure our health by reckless indifference or by self-willed mortifications ; to injure our temporal affairs by rash speculations ; to run into debt without necessity ; to indulge in sloth and yet expect to be maintained, as if God, Who has promised us the necessities of life, but has ordained that we should eat our bread in the sweat of our brow, were bound to help us when we will not help ourselves ; to undertake important schemes, either for our own interests or for the good of others, without calculation, without diligent preparation, and even without earnest efforts to learn God's will by prayer. In our spiritual life we are incited to all sorts of irreverent rashness, irreverent sloth, undue liberties with God, presumptuous plunges into danger, and perversions of theological and ascetical truths to our own harm. Again, all wilful and needless exposure of ourselves

to temptations, such as we have noticed before, is a sort of casting ourselves down in a vain and sinful confidence that God will interfere to deliver us from the consequences of our own folly. In many instances, as we saw before, the temptation to unauthorised gratification is combined with this temptation to unauthorised confidence; and such acts as reading heretical or licentious books, going freely and without necessity into Protestant society, lingering in dangerous company, resorting to dangerous places of amusement, cherishing opinions opposed in any way to the mind of the Holy See, and the like, would fall under the class of trying to turn stones into bread, or under that of casting ourselves down at the devil's bidding, according to the predominance of the desire of gratification, or of a presumptuous confidence as the chief motive.

5. To all such suggestions to presumption, we are to answer at once, and with determination, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." God, who promises to uphold us in all danger through which He bids us or causes us to pass, has forbidden us to expose our bodies, and, still more, our souls, to the risk of destruction; and to presume on His protection when we cast ourselves down without His leave is but to aggravate our guilt. "Let us not tempt Christ as some of them tempted, and perished by the serpents."* Instead of good Angels bearing them up, those who presumptuously tempt God will find evil spirits precipitating their fall.

* 1 Cor. x. 9.

SERMON IV.

THE THIRD TEMPTATION.

Iterum assumpsit eum diabolus in montem excelsum valde, et ostendit ei omnia regna mundi et gloriam eorum, et dixit ei: Hec omnia tibi dabo, si cadens adoraveris me. Tunc dixit ei Jesus: Vade, satana, scriptum est enim: Dominum Deum tuum adorabis, et illi soli servies. Tunc reliquit eum diabolus, et ecce Angeli accesserunt et ministrabant ei.

Again the devil took him up into a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and said to Him: All these will I give Thee, if falling down Thou wilt adore me. Then Jesus said to Him: Begone, Satan, for it is written, The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil left him, and behold Angels came and ministered to Him.

(Words taken from the 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th verses of the 4th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.)

LET us dispose ourselves once more, my dear friends, for the profitable study of this mystery of our Lord's temptation, by adoring Him as God, thanking Him for His patient endurance of such depths of pain and humiliation for love of us, and renewing our firm convictions of the literal truth of the sacred narrative, and of the certainty that all was done, suffered, and permitted for our own consolation and instruction.

I. We proceed at once then to consider the third and last assault upon our Lord that has been recorded, and, as before, to think of the corresponding temptations to be expected and resisted by ourselves. The Evil One probably found himself

compelled to return with the sacred Person of our Lord from Jerusalem to the desert whence he had taken Him; and then, half despairing of success, and raging at his own discomfiture, yet unwilling to leave any mode of attack untried, he exerted all his immense power and skill as arch-fiend and prince of sorcerers to give effect to a temptation so gross and palpable that, if it failed, he could not expect any other opening, at least for a time. He took our Lord up to the summit of the mountain, which towers above all the surrounding heights in the midst of that desert region; and pointing thence towards the chief cities and seats of empire in different parts of the world, he conjured up and spread out before our Lord's eyes a gorgeous and dazzling spectacle of all the wealth and splendour, all the luxurious enjoyment and refined elegance, and all the tokens of power and majesty to be found in each; and offered to hand all over to Him, and make Him absolute master of the whole world, on condition of paying homage to himself as His liege lord. St. Luke adds that all was done "in a moment of time," and that Satan urged his proposal by asserting that he had the disposal of all committed to him, and could give to whom he chose. I think that it is hardly consistent with the literal truth of the inspired text to suppose, with one or two of the early writers, that it was only by an eloquent and vivid verbal description that the tempter made this display. I see no sort of difficulty in believing that he produced the same kind of visible presentation of all the grandeur of the whole world that those who

have had dealings with him have effected by magical arts on a small scale with regard to particular scenes actually far removed from the view of the spectator. I shall not attempt any explanation of the process by which the feat may have been accomplished; both because the question does not seem of any practical interest, and because, after having studied some explanations that have been given, I found them harder to understand than the fact itself.

2. What it is more to our purpose to remark—and to this, therefore, I next invite your attention—is the representation that the devil was involuntarily making of himself for our warning when he was busy about that picture of the world; the representation of his own amazing insolence and audacity, of the desperate obstinacy with which he perseveres in carrying on his warfare, even after repeated defeats, and of the limits, as well as the extent, of his knowledge and power. What an adversary is this with whom we have to contend, who after such proofs of the invulnerability of the Soul that he is assailing, still persists in the assault, who has the effrontery to invite One, in whom he recognises greater holiness than any one that he has ever attacked before, and Whom he has reason to believe to be the Son of God, to fall down and pay homage to himself for the sake of earthly greatness; and that, after having completely failed both in the attempt to move Him through his bodily feelings and in the solicitation to vainglory and presumption! And what must be his power, when, on being permitted to use it, he can concentrate all the fascina-

tions of the whole world's greatness and glory into one moment's visible display, and one moment's torrent of temptation! Yet, on the other hand, what blindness! What inability to detect the full character and true nature of his opponent! What inability to understand true lowliness of heart and perfect disinterestedness! And what weakness, even in the full putting forth of his stupendous power! He cannot enslave, he can only offer bribes to the free soul to sell itself into slavery. He can unrol his glittering wares, and say, "All this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and do homage;" but he cannot help letting it be seen that the soul to which he offers them is as free to reject as to accept his proposal. Observe also the shameless falsehood of the father of lies, and at the same time the foundation of fact, on which, as is usually the case, it is made to rest. It is true that in a certain sense, and in a certain degree, he has the disposal of earthly prizes. He is termed in Holy Scripture, "The god of this world." No doubt the possession of a delicate conscience is a great obstacle to worldly advancement. Those who are ready to give the devil some token of subjection, have thereby a better chance of attaining to something of that false greatness on which, instead of on the true greatness of loving obedience to God, they have allowed their hearts to be fixed. Yet it is certain, in spite of the devil's false boastings, and he cannot hide the fact, that all the while the Lord God reigns on high and overrules all things, and that through all the confused chaos of earthly events, through all the lurid mists of human crime, and

through all the seeming triumphs of evil, He is ever and infallibly working out His sovereign will. It is certain that the devil is in chains, and cannot go a step farther than he is permitted; that at any time those who have been ensnared by him can by God's grace escape from his dominion; and that, great as his successes are, he fails as signally as he succeeds. And even the poor prizes that he offers instead of the blessedness of serving God, are after all a mere shadow, and are neither certain of attainment, nor stable if obtained, nor satisfactory even while possessed. Few, if any, of the devil's dupes ever reach the height of success that he promised them; none find peace or repose even on earth. What he really gives them, is a share of his own disquiet, and a ceaseless gnawing of the heart, a slight foretaste of the undying worm that will prey upon them for ever, if they do not turn back while there is time to the service of their rightful King.

3. Once more, my dear friends, we are warned to prepare our souls for temptation. Even if we had triumphed over all cravings of the lower part of our nature, and had kept ourselves free from vain-glory and presumption, the tempter would not leave us in peace. He would try to carry our hearts by storm, to dazzle and overwhelm us with the splendour of the earthly greatness that he displayed before our eyes, and so lead us to give him some token of submission. He would do this, even though he expected that, if this more open assault failed, he would be so clearly detected and so thoroughly detested, that the energy with which our souls cried

out, "Begone Satan," would force him to retire for a time. It is often his plan, when defeated, instead of resorting, as we should have expected, to insinuations of evil of a milder character, to stake everything on a violent assault, like the last desperate charge that a squadron makes, just before throwing down their arms and taking to flight. And there is this to animate us to resistance in such cases, that if we hold our ground firmly, we are sure of an interval of peace after victory.

This third class of temptations to ambition and worldliness is as vast in its range and as varied in its different forms as the others. The soul of man since the fall is that of a monarch in exile, and it has a mournful sense of its dethronement, and a craving after lost sovereignty; but alas! instead of seeking that true dominion over self which it has lost, it is ready to listen to the voice of the tempter, offering it an outward and earthly kingdom. The tempter is ever at hand, with such offers as he thinks are likely to be accepted. He observes the condition and special circumstances of each; he studies the natural character, and observes the indications already given by the soul of the sort of fascination that will most move it, and of the extent of subjection to evil to which it is prepared to go, and he combines and modifies his baits accordingly; but to every one he makes a display of some kind of kingdom and the glory of it, and promises possession of it in return for homage to himself. To some few, in whom he has recognised a certain grandeur of spirit, that would spurn all but

the very highest of his prizes, or a capacity of doing mischief beyond the ordinary, he has made the same offer as to our Lord. He has induced them to aspire to the actual dominion of the whole world, and has led them on by the display of this prize through seas of blood and countless crimes, till they have seemed to be on the point of realising their expectations; and then they have fallen suddenly, and have been followed by their tempter to the judgment-seat, to enforce the cries of millions of widows and orphans for a signal retribution. Before the end of the world there will appear one, who will not only be ready to pay the most explicit homage to Satan, for the sake of universal empire, but who will be permitted to attain his desire. For a short space of time the chosen vicar of the Evil One will reign supreme, exalting himself above all things sacred and profane, while he himself adores only his foul master, and his lust of power will show itself in a more furious persecution than any that have gone before of all who remain faithful to Christ and Christ's Church.

But for every one, in every age and under every circumstance, the tempter has ready the offer of a kingdom; and the condition is always to commit some sin, which is a token of submission to himself. For "whoso sins is the servant of sin,"* and the servant of the Evil One. Between the emperor meditating a war of aggression for the extension of his frontier, and the artisan trying to be supreme in a pot-house; between a conspirator sharpening his dagger against an enemy of his secret society, and a good Priest

* St. John viii. 34.

half-consciously dreaming that a mitre would fit him uncommonly well—what an immense variety of degrees of temptation and of modes of presenting it! The stamp of the foot and the hand raised to strike her baby brother is a little homage to the enemy, that the child, who is only just old enough to sin, has given in return for the offer of the kingdom of the nursery. And too often those, whose duty it is to suppress the first and faintest indications of ambition, are ready to make it a matter of amusement and applause. At school and college the danger increases, the temptation is more urgent, and the subjection demanded greater. The devil of sloth must be cast out if possible, and we try to cast it out by exciting to emulation; but, if we do not take care to impress upon our children that it is to please God, and to do His will, that they are called upon to exert themselves and gain prizes, and not for the sake of superiority over others; and that the greatest dunce in the school, the most unsuccessful competitor at college, if he is more humble, and has more love of God in his heart than the most distinguished of his companions, is unspeakably higher in God's favour and has a far higher throne prepared for him—we may easily be doing far more harm by fostering ambition, than good by exciting to industry. As life goes on the scene is changed, and the kingdom offered is different, but the poisonous insinuation is always the same—"This will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me." In all professions and pursuits, in trade, in commerce, in law and medicine, in the cultivation of the intellect, in art and science,

in the service of the State, there are always rivals to be outstripped, and a certain measure of greatness to which the man may expect to attain, but only at the cost of some wounds to the conscience, some fraudulent or extortionate practice, some neglect or oppression of the poor, some disobedience to the laws of the Church, some disrespect to the decrees of the Holy See, some abandonment of the right cause ; all which things are really, though not formally, so much homage to Satan.

The woman is no less tempted with a variety of kingdoms adapted to her tastes, and at the price of a no less deadly devil-worship. That she may rule over a circle of admirers, that she may have pet slaves ready to fetch and carry at her bidding, what a round of dissipation, what neglect of religion, what lavish waste of money, what cries of starving or perverted orphans in the very folds of her dress, what fearful blood of souls on her conscience, from the sinful thoughts and glances that she has deliberately set herself to excite ! Then there is the royalty of a marriage above her rank, and, to obtain it, further profusion, all sorts of manœuvring, wounds to piety and to faith, a wading through sin to her object no less certain than that of an Alexander or Napoleon, and perhaps at last a sacrilegious reception of the sacrament of matrimony. Then, perhaps, there is the royalty of fashionable supremacy ; and more widows and orphans must mingle their curses with the fragrance of her conservatories, and the flattering hum of her assemblies ; and more neglected duties must be registered against

her, in order that she may be for a season the undisputed head of the petty coterie that she aspires to rule. Or it is the kingdom of her own home that is attractive to her. She knows that her Creator has commanded wives to obey their husbands for His sake; she knows that she is bound by a solemn and irrevocable vow of obedience; but there is the tempter beside her, representing the satisfaction of ruling rather than obeying, and the ease with which it may be brought about, and she makes haste to fall down before him, in order to realise the prospect. The same sort of temptations are plied, with suitable modifications, in the servant's hall as well as in the drawing-room, in the poor man's lodging as well as in the palace or the baronial seat, though of course poverty has an immense advantage, in lessening both the strength of the temptation and the grievousness of the sins to which it leads.

Even from works really good, and really undertaken at first for the glory of God, this temptation is not absent. How is it that so many good schemes are wrecked almost as soon as they are launched? How is it that so many good people, working with energy, accomplish so little? Of course there are other reasons of failure, such as that tempting of God, of which we thought last Sunday. But is not this one reason, that even into work commenced for God's sake there often creeps this lust of dominion? Such a pious lady will work long and work hard; she will gladly neglect her meals and abstain from amusements, and deny herself many comforts, and overcome many repugnances; but one luxury she

will not forego, that of having her own way, and being the chief mover and presiding spirit in all she undertakes. This petty kingdom has caught her fancy; and, although she would not fall down to the extent of mortal sin to secure it, she is ready to make all that amount of submission which the devil, who is wary, and content to wait, demands of her; and so the work languishes, and her own soul languishes, and the best to be hoped, the least to be feared for herself, is that she may be saved "as by fire," while her works are burned up.

4. When this third and most openly impious suggestion was made to our Lord, He replied promptly and energetically as before, but with more display of majesty: "Begone, Satan, for it is written, The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve." This is to be the resolute answer to all temptations to worldly ambition, and this is the great lesson not only from this part of the subject, but from the whole history. Our allegiance is claimed by two masters—God and Satan; we must serve one, we cannot serve two, and in whatever degree we give our hearts, the exclusive possession of which belongs to God and is claimed by Him, to any sensual gratification, or self-exaltation, or earthly greatness, in that degree we become rebels against the Divine Majesty, and are paying homage to the powers of darkness.

5. Satan had no power to resist the command to begone. And he has no power to resist any faithful soul that gives itself wholly to God. "The devil left Him, and Angels came and ministered to Him."

The good Angels rejoice in every victory over temptation. Even in the thickest of the strife, and in the blackest darkness, we are never left alone. Our Guardian Angel is with us, and our Lord Himself, who conquered for us, is with us. And it is but a brief space of time that the whole season of conflict can last, and if we are faithful to the end, Angels will come, not only to minister to us, but to usher us triumphantly into the presence of Him Who will say : "Well done, good and faithful servant;" "Thou hast fought a good fight;" "Enter into the joy of the Lord."

THE ANGELUS BELL.

FIVE LECTURES

BY THE

REV. PETER GALLWEY,

Of the Society of Jesus.

- I. INTRODUCTORY.
- II. EVILS OCCASIONED BY TOO MUCH DEPRESSION.
- III. DESOLATION—ITS CHARACTER. SOME REMEDIES.
- IV. OTHER REMEDIES AGAINST DESOLATION.
- V. OUR LORD'S PRESCRIPTION—"ASK, SEEK, KNOCK."

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- II. EVILS OCCASIONED BY TOO MUCH DEPRESSION.
- III. DESOLATION—ITS CHARACTER. SOME REMEDIES.
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S U M M A R Y.

LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTORY.

AN Angelus Bell in this city bears the inscription : "What thou didst hear in the ear, Mary, I will preach upon the housetops."

The sum of that Mystery which Mary heard is contained in the words : "And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us." Thrice in a day the Angelus Bell reminds us of them. It were then a holy thought to set up an Angelus Bell wherever it could be done.

But the object of the present course of Lectures is to consider how to find a remedy for that depression and desolation which make the hearing of the Angelus Bell a pain rather than a consolation. Many remedies suggested will often seem to fail, such as—

1. That this depression is a passing cloud.
2. That it is the necessary trial of the good gold.
3. That it is an especial mark of God's love.
4. That it is the result of some physical malady.
5. That it proceeds from an unhealthy craving after sensible devotion.
6. That it comes from want of perseverance in devotion to our Lady.
7. That St. Joseph should be appealed to with all the confidence of St. Teresa.
8. That we must be more tenderly devout to the Sacred Heart.
9. That this depression is really caused by some temporary moral distress.

The true remedy is to be drawn from the words spoken by our Lady in secret respecting the Incarnation, and preached on the house-tops by the Angelus Bell.

LECTURE II.

EVILS OCCASIONED BY TOO MUCH DEPRESSION.

THE persons here spoken of are those who habitually avoid all mortal sins, but who do not unfrequently commit venial sin.

The depression here spoken of is that hopeless sadness which does not come from God.

Consider, first, the language of the Holy Scripture respecting this sadness ; and, secondly, the nature of those evils which Holy Scripture describes.

1. Too much depression hinders the soul from making progress in

the love of God ; because it wears out our endurance, it engenders great dread and dismay, and this prolonged fear destroys love.

2. Too much depression prevents that prayer which strengthens love. It makes prayer distasteful to man as being useless, unmeaning, hypocritical. It makes prayer unpleasing to God because it shakes the foundation of faith and hope within us, and so makes our prayer light and inconstant.

3. This depression adds to our other sins the poison of despair, and thus paralyzes every effort for amendment.

By doing this it especially prepares the way for the vices of anger and sensuality.

LECTURE III.

DESOLATION—ITS CHARACTER. SOME REMEDIES.

I. DESOLATION, as described by St. Ignatius, is a darkness over-spreading the soul, and attended by trouble and agitation.

It is followed by weariness of things spiritual, and desire for worldly amusements and pursuits. It exposes to temptation, and inclines us to be reckless. Desolation, as gathered from its opposite, consolation, is not a fixed state of the soul, but in great measure occasioned from without by the action of unseen spirits, friendly or hostile to the soul. When this action is removed, a sudden and great change takes place.

II. Hence among the remedies for depression we have—

1. The word of counsel : “ Resist the devil and he will flee from you,” for peace and consolation will soon come back if we do not lose heart, and this depression may still be a passing cloud.

2. A second remedy against depression is to remember that it is not necessarily a mark of God’s displeasure, for this takes the sting out of the anguish that is often felt. When in this state it will help us if we remember that, in the first place, we are not in our normal condition ; in the next place, that the evil spirits are not strong, but must fly if we resist them ; and thirdly, that we are not necessarily guilty, though besmeared, so to speak, with the slime of the serpent.

LECTURE IV.

OTHER REMEDIES AGAINST DESOLATION.

I. The third remedy, which at first seemed to fail, is nevertheless most useful in the time of desolation. We should have correct ideas with regard to the love of God. If we are free from grievous sin we are still in God’s love. There is a very great variety in the forms in which love expresses itself. Love is not always smiling, but “ he that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me.”

II. Another true remedy, before touched on, is that we are to live and walk by faith, and have to believe without feeling ; and in this we are called upon to resemble Jesus Christ Himself.

III. It is true also to attribute depression to physical causes, for (1.) holiness does not exempt us from bodily ailments ; it may indeed

easily be that we suffer far too little. (2.) The state of the body so often depresses the soul that we can easily fall into the mistake of believing sickness of the body to be wickedness of the soul. (3.) We should not then, on the one hand, expect too much demonstration of piety from the sick, nor lose hope because we, too, feel how "the corruptible body weighs down the soul." (4.) We should try to keep our bodies in that state in which they can prove most fitting instruments for the soul.

The whole instruction is closed by two observations. In the first place, since the spirits learn how to plan their attacks from the study of the faculties of the soul, of the temperament of the body, of the nature of different habits, so it is each one's business to learn, with great study and painstaking, all that can be known about himself. In the second place, we ought greatly to esteem the possession of sound doctrine, and gladly listen to the teaching of Holy Church, and her appointed Ministers.

LECTURE V.

OUR LORD'S PRESCRIPTION—"ASK, SEEK, KNOCK."

THESE words contain our charter ; they form a new covenant, which makes over Heaven to us.

I. "Ask and it shall be given to you." Prayer, then, is a remedy for depression. This is better seen from the consideration of three truths.

1. Prayer is not at all impossible in the state of desolation ; the power of the evil spirits is severely restricted by God.

2. Prayer in the time of desolation is no mockery, but all the more acceptable to God, for it is far harder to pray for a few minutes than than for many hours when all was consolation.

3. We cannot expect to know at present the effect of our prayers. For, first, one very precious answer to them is protection from evils, of many of which we may be unconscious ; secondly, it is in the long eternity that the chief answer to them must come.

II. "Seek and ye shall find." When the fallen angels are permitted to make an attack on us they especially dread our seeking advice, or speaking to an experienced spiritual guide.

III. "Knock and it shall be opened to you." God shares with us, as far as He can, His attribute of strength and power. We must use, then, our freewill and strength if we would have Heaven opened to us.

This is done by penance, and our chief penance is humiliation. This is the answer which our Blessed Lady whispers in secret, and which the Angelus Bell preaches from the housetops. "He looked down on the lowliness of His handmaid." Humiliation should be easy, and when the heart is humbled God can no longer despise us. The question is, Do we sufficiently practise humility? Our humiliation after death will be most accurately measured, according to our sins and the amount of our expiation. How much will be thus entailed before the last farthing is paid? Depression of soul, therefore, is not unnatural—there is cause enough for it.

TO THE READER.

THE following Instructions are little more than a development of the Rules found in the Exercises of St. Ignatius for the management of the Soul in the time of Desolation.

LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THERE is hanging, brethren, over one of the chapels of this city a small Angelus Bell, on which is engraved this inscription: *Quod audisti in aure, Maria, prædicabo super tecta*—"What thou didst hear in the ear, Mary, I will preach upon the housetops." The Angelus Bell is one of the many instruments which the Holy Church employs in the discharge of the duty laid upon her—to preach from the housetops the mysteries which her Divine Spouse revealed in secret. Three times each day it recalls to the minds of forgetful men the word that Gabriel spoke in secret to Mary, the answer which in secret she whispered, and the glorious mystery which, in consequence of her answer, was worked out in secret. For "the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us." It is the opening of the Month of Mary that has directed my attention to the Angelus Bell, but the subject which I intend to lay before you is one that would not be out of place at any season of the year. I might, perhaps, be justified in saying as much were I about to speak to you of our Blessed Lady, since the Angelus Bell has, to a certain extent, changed every month of the year into a Month of Mary, by never permitting men to forget the mystery of the

Incarnation. For wherever the great truth—that the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us—is faithfully preached and rightly understood, there is the ancient devotion to our Lady sure to abound, and every day of the Christian year becomes a Festival in honour of the Word made Flesh and of his Ever Blessed Mother. But the thoughts which I desire to bring before you, though they might be suggested by the Angelus Bell, are not exclusively connected with it. They might be awakened in the soul by any of those many holy rites and ceremonies through which, as through a thousand tongues, the Holy Church preaches to the faithful people the secrets committed to her by her Divine Spouse.

The Angelus Bell, then, brethren, is one of the countless means which the Bride of Christ, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, adopts to change the valley of tears into the paradise of regenerated man, by reminding Christian families of the good tidings, that “the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us.” In the early morning its sound breaks on the ear of the sleeper, to win for our Creator the first-fruits which He always so much values—the first thoughts of the new day. Redeemed man awakes, saying, with the Psalmist, “O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day;” and reminded by the voice from the housetops that “the Word was made Flesh and dwells among us,” his soul is drawn to the holy altar and to the tabernacle, and before he sets his hands to any of his daily tasks he makes haste, if he may, to the sanctuary, to gain from the Holy Sacrifice all the graces necessary to enable him

to be through every hour of the day a true follower of his Incarnate Lord. At noontide, again, the sound of the Angelus Bell suddenly hushes into silence the busy world, and speaking to our souls that word which we need to have so often repeated—*Sursum corda*, "Lift up your hearts," reminds us that man is no longer a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water, since "the Word is made Flesh," and God is become man that man may become divine and like to God. Once again, at evening, the Angelus Bell sends forth its consoling sound to announce to the children of God that the work of the day is done, and that the labours of this life will also have an end. For the Christian's destiny is not to toil and mourn for ever. He is ransomed at a great price from slavery. Everlasting rest is now his birthright, because the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us. In the peace of this hope the Christian family lies down to rest when the stillness of night is come.

It is, then, brethren, a holy and wholesome thought to set up the Angelus Bell above the housetop, to spread through the city or over the country parish "the good tidings of great joy to all the people." None but God's recording Angel know how many holy thoughts its voice has inspired, how many fierce temptations it has lulled to rest, how much sin it has prevented, how many conversions it has commenced. For the Father of the prodigal is watching, too glad to reward any little act of piety with an outpouring of grace. I have heard it related, brethren, that when the Bishops of the Church assembled some years since in the Eternal City around the

Vicar of Christ Jesus, to deliberate whether the time were come to promulgate as a dogma of our faith the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, there were among them some who had arrived in Rome persuaded that their duty was to resist strenuously a measure which seemed to them inexpedient, and likely to occasion discord. And accordingly, so runs the narrative, in a Congregation held upon this subject, this adverse view was forcibly stated by one Right Reverend Prelate, and his arguments were making impression and eliciting marks of approbation which foreboded opposition and disunion, when suddenly, in the midst of the unpropitious discourse, the Angelus Bell sounded. The tongues of men were silent, and the assembled Bishops knelt to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit remind them that "the Word was made Flesh," and that Mary is the Mother of God; and from that short prayer they rose unable to approve of any word that did not do her due honour. The Prelate who had been speaking was the first to refute his own argument; and all heartily concurred in one conclusion—that the successor of St. Peter and Vicar of Christ Jesus might safely follow the unerring spirit that ever guided him to whom the keys are given. Now, brethren, whether this story be correct in all its details or not, we may at least say with security that the effect which is ascribed in it to the Angelus Bell is quite in keeping with all our notions. We take it for granted that very great graces must often descend during these moments of silence, when the Christian world is doing homage to the Incarnation of our Lord. And

consequently we are not at all surprised that it should be a favourite form of almsgiving in Catholic lands to provide a parish with its Angelus Bell. What more natural? For as we are always advised when doing good to adopt the maxim of St. Ignatius, *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*—that is, to select from among the charitable works before us the one which will spread graces and blessings most widely, and will endure the longest time—you can understand at once how well chosen an alms an Angelus Bell is, since its notes will reach so many souls, and it will continue to preach upon the housetops the glad tidings of our Lord's Incarnation when he who gave it can himself speak no more; when his bones and his children's are mouldering in the churchyard from whence the Angelus Bell utters perseveringly its holy teaching.

If, then, brethren, the evil of the time allowed it, if there were not still lingering in this land a remnant of penal laws, and more than a remnant of that undying hostility to the Woman and her Child which was foretold in Genesis, it would be a very fitting topic for the month of May to urge you to make generous and persevering efforts to set up the Angelus Bell in its place above the housetops of every city, every town, every hamlet of this country; that its holy invitation might be heard in every home, in every street, in every lane, along the hill-sides, throughout our valleys, by our manufacturers at their looms, by our farmers in their fields, by our seamen as they leave the harbour or come home from sea. This would be a step in the direction of Christianising

once more this island once so holy. It would be a part of the work which the Church of Christ has to do on earth. For I assume, brethren, that the work of the Spouse of Christ Jesus is to carry into effect the wish of the three blessed children who walked in the fiery furnace of Babylon, saying—"All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord. Ye mountains and hills, ye seas and rivers, bless the Lord." The wish of our Blessed Lord and His loving Spouse would undoubtedly be that every hill should remind us of Calvary, that every garden should contain some reminiscence of Gethsemani, that our highways and lanes should bring back to our hearts the Way of the Cross, that wherever the eye rests on the country landscape, or the shores of the sea, or the crowded streets of our cities, it should everywhere find some memorial of the great fact that "the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us."

Meanwhile, however, brethren, as even when we do possess the Angelus Bell in this country we are not always free to enjoy its use, I am not now thinking of rousing you to an effort to multiply them throughout the land. I am going to deal with one out of the innumerable impressions, so varied in character, that might be left, and no doubt have been left, on the souls of men by the sound of the Angelus Bell. For holy Simeon foretold that Jesus and Mary would be set up as a kind of spectacle, "that out of many hearts thoughts might be revealed." And we find, in fact, that the Blessed Eucharist, the crucifix, the Madonna, and the holy ceremonies of religion, awaken in different souls every variety of impression,

according to their dispositions, so that we may say of them all, as St. Thomas said of the Blessed Sacrament, *Mors est malis vita bonis*—

By this heavenly bread
The good man's life is fed,
The bad become more dead.

As the manna had every variety of taste, so may the Angelus Bell pour forth a music harsh or sweet, sad or joyful, according to the state of our souls. The old popular legend of this country tells us how a despairing youth was roused to energy and put in the way of fortune, because his imagination interpreted the sound of a bell into a clear prophecy of his future greatness. The Angelus Bell, then, brethren, will affect us according to our spiritual state, and among the impressions which it might make there is one of which I wish to treat in detail during the instructions of this month.

Were there then a question of setting up an Angelus Bell in some church in town or country, there are more, I think, than a few who, if they spoke out their inward thoughts, would answer with heavy hearts, and say: "By all means, set it up. Far be it from me to stand in the way of any project that may do good to others, and bring honour to our Lord and to our Lady. At the same time, I must ask the question, What shall I gain by hearing the Angelus Bell ring? Will the sound bring peace to my soul? Alas! if its sound could have made me holy or happy, I ought to have been long ago a joyful saint. For from childhood I grew up within the sound of the Angelus Bell;

and what have I profited from that warning? So that now its note falls on my ear like a funeral note—a mournful reminder of my sorrow. For, three times a day it peals to put me in mind of my long estrangement from our Blessed Lord. Men say that it announces peace; but there is not peace for me. They remind me that the Angels at Bethlehem foretold that the Incarnation would be a great joy to all nations; and so it is no doubt, and ought to be. But for that very reason is my state the more deplorable if the life and death of our Lord bring not joy to me. This is a proof that there is something very wrong within me. They argue with me that according to the Gospel our Lord's burden is light, and His yoke sweet. I dare say it is so to others, but then my case is all the worse, since to me life is a burden, not light, but exceedingly heavy. They bid me go to our Lord, and they repeat His words, 'Come to Me all you who labour, and I will refresh you;' but these words only prove how wrong my condition must be, since they do not prove true in my case. I do go to our Lord, and am not refreshed. They take me up, and urge that if I loved our Lord, I should find His burden light; and I answer, Exactly so, if I loved Him, I have no doubt I should find His burden light and His yoke sweet; but the very essence of my lament is this, that I cannot love Him. I have laboured hard in order to gain some love for Him, and I don't succeed; and therefore, when I am assured that He loves me ardently, I am obliged to tell the truth, and say, I can believe that He loves others who are more worthy; but the answer

that I get from my own soul, whenever I hear it said that He loves me ardently is, on the contrary, that He cannot love me, that He must be displeased with me—that for some cause or another I am under the ban. At last, I am tired of hearing old trite sayings and texts, which no doubt are quite true as they stand, but for some cause unknown all fail in my case. It is easy to say to me, ‘Ask and you shall receive :’ I have asked more times than I can count, I have prayed by the hour in church and out of church. You will say that I don’t pray aright ; but then tell me how to mend my prayer. I want peace ; I want to be at rest with my Creator. Tell me how to pray, and I will gladly do it. You say to me, ‘Knock, and it shall be opened to you ;’ but I have knocked, I have used violence, I have made many sacrifices to obtain fervour and an ardent love for my Saviour, but I am always kept at a distance from Him. Then you will no doubt ask, Have I sought also, as the promise is, ‘Seek and you shall find.’ Therefore I will tell you at once that I have sought wherever there was a chance of finding. If ever I came near any one whose reputation for spiritual wisdom was great, I went and put my difficulty to him—How can I find peace ? I wish to love my God ; how shall I procure what I want ? Shall I tell you the result of my search ?

1. “One answered me and said, ‘Be of good courage, it is a passing cloud.’ A passing cloud ! but how long will this cloud require to pass away ? The rain in Noe’s time fell for forty days. Am I to expect this cloud to scatter after forty days ? It has

been over me forty times forty days. Or must I wait one hundred and fifty days—for so many elapsed before the water began to pass away after the Flood? May I expect even then to see the dove bring me the olive branch, in token of peace and forgiveness? Alas! I wish my case was that of a passing cloud.

2. "Therefore I went away to another seer, and he answered, 'Be of good courage, it is a trial. "Gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation."'* But this is the question—Am I gold or silver? The gold or silver in the furnace is gold or silver, there is no doubt of that; and if I were certain that I am gold or silver, I could bear my torture like a martyr. But if I am gold and silver, why don't I know it? How comes it that I always feel guilty and under the ban?

3. "So once more I went away sad, and looked out for a third adviser, and he said, 'Be of good courage. You do love our Lord ardently, and He loves you, and you are holy. You are not His enemy, you do not hate Him, you would not sin against Him.' Hate Him! no, Heaven forbid. What reason have I to sin against Him, at least grievously? Certainly not, because I dare not; I am not mad; I dare not cast myself into hell. But as for loving ardently, or loving even moderately, if I did that I would not be here asking advice. It is precisely because I am quite sure that I don't love ardently, nor even moderately, and because I know that I

* Ecclus. ii. 5.

ought to love, that I wander about wretched, and though I hope I am absolved from my sins, yet I cannot feel that our Lord loves me, or that I love Him. I can only believe that I am forgiven about as much as Absalom was by his father when he was not allowed into his presence. I am no longer under sentence of condemnation I hope, but I am not allowed to come home. I am not allowed to be intimate and familiar. I am always reminded that I am not wholly forgiven.

4 "Hence once more I had to wander in search of a cure, and a fourth physician of souls pitied my case, and said to me, 'Be of good courage, it is probably your health that troubles you. There is rheumatism or gout in your system, or something amiss with your nerves or your heart that is causing this depression. Do you not remember what the wise man wrote—"The corruptible body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind that museth upon many things."'* But I am well! quite well! I can run and I can ride; I can eat and I can sleep. There is no sickness in me. 'Oh, no doubt you think so, because you are not conscious of your malady; but there may be some latent disorder.' But will a latent disorder which I don't feel in any way, and which physicians do not discover, excuse me for living as I do, when I am told that others who have constant illness and sharp pains arrive at great union with our Lord? 'That is no argument,' my good-natured counsellor urges, 'for sharp pains might rouse to exertion; but

* Wisdom ix. 15.

you may be in that midway state, neither well nor ill, that is so specially distressing.' Alas! I answer, until I come to my prayers I am perfectly in health, and therefore what I fear is, that it is my soul that is in the midway state, neither hot nor cold, which our Lord abominates.

5. "So once more I went away unsatisfied. And my next adviser said to me sternly, 'Incredulous generation! you seek a sign. You are craving after a sensible devotion; you are looking for spiritual luxuries. You must cultivate more solid piety; you must walk by faith; you must be anxious only to fulfil your duties and save your soul.' Precisely what I want to do. I want no luxuries. I want peace; I want hope; I want to love our Lord. I find myself strongly drawn towards earthly enjoyments. I want to have some inward fervour, some love for my God that will counteract the effects of the fascination of this world.

6. "Once more, then, disappointment! And once more I seek in the hope of finding. And this time my spiritual physician hears my lament, and he too says, 'Be of good cheer;' and then straightway he goes on to cite piously St. Bernard's prayer—'Remember, O most holy Virgin, that no one ever had recourse to thee in vain.' Alas! had they been new to me I might have been cheered at the sound of those words; but I could not count how often I have muttered those words in times gone by, nor tell you when I heard them first. I dare not and will not call them in question. The fault is assuredly not in our Lady. Still, all the same, I go away not sanguine.

7. "And after a time I am forced to seek again for help, and now my new guide answers briefly and oracularly, 'Go to Joseph,' and reminds me of St. Teresa's prescription, which she left on record—that she never invoked the glorious Saint without gaining what she asked. I listen and cannot help answering in my mind, She was St. Teresa. No wonder, when a Saint prays to a Saint, if the prayer prevails. So I go out desponding still.

8. "And I made one more attempt. And this time I am assured that the cloud will be scattered and perfect sunshine restored if I will cultivate a tender devotion to the Sacred Heart of our Lord. But it occurred to me at once that this is precisely the pearl of great price I want to gain. It is this tender love of our Lord that I crave for; and it is because I know that the first and great commandment is that I must love Him tenderly, that my soul is so dissatisfied with its present state.

9. "Lastly, my latest counsellor, who pitied my distress exceedingly, asked me if I owed any money, or if there had been a death in my family, or if I had met with any great disappointment or unkind usage? No; unfortunately, all my bills are paid, and for two years I have lost no relative by death except a distant cousin, who died immediately after baptism. I cannot be fretting for him; neither can I think of any ill-usage from friends or disappointed hopes that could in any way account for my suffering state. Therefore, I ask, what will the Angelus Bell do for me? If there were some blessed and enchanted bell, that had a power to reach with its tones the inmost

soul, and make impressions there—within the range of that bell I would fix my home ; there would I live, near that bell would I be buried.”

I have dwelt, my brethren, long upon this spiritual difficulty, this state of desolation and despondency, because it is not a rare one, and so long as it remains an unintelligible perplexity, it prevents not only the Angelus Bell, but the holy sacraments, the altar, the tabernacle, and all that plentiful redemption which our Lord has provided, from producing their full effect, and giving all that consolation and strength to the soul which they are intended to give. Therefore I will in the following instructions study this difficulty, and as the Angelus Bell has suggested it, so, from the words spoken by our Lady in secret respecting the Incarnation, and preached on the housetops by the Angelus Bell, I will draw the answer to it.

LECTURE II.

EVILS OCCASIONED BY TOO MUCH DEPRESSION.

WE are then considering, brethren, the spiritual condition of one who says that the sound of the Angelus Bell brings him no gladness, no tranquillity of mind. And entering into further details about the state of his soul, he tells us that though he commits too frequently venial sins with more or less deliberation, he cannot find out that his soul is charged with the guilt of grievous sin, since he has, as far as he knows, carefully confessed every mortal sin committed, and been duly absolved, and consequently is bound to suppose that he lives in the grace and favour of God. All this notwithstanding, his habitual feeling is one of painful estrangement from his Creator. Day after day he carries about with him a conviction which he cannot shake off, that he is under God's displeasure, and therefore he does not find gladness or peace in the sacraments, in prayer, or the remembrance of our Lord's life and death. Christmas comes and goes, Easter-time follows with its alleluias, but they make no change in the melancholy monotony of his soul. "The Church," he says, "cries out to me, 'Rejoice, I say again, rejoice.' And if I cast my eye upon a psalm I read the invitation—'Come,

let us praise the Lord with joy,' or something similar. If I meet my friends, one says—'I wish you joy;' another, 'Peace be to you;' a third wishes me a happy Feast-day. And the answer to all these greetings which comes to my lips, though I dare not always utter it—lest I scandalise some weak brethren and mar their happiness—is the answer of old Tobias when St. Raphael said to him, 'Joy be with thee always,'—'What manner of joy shall be to me who see not the light of Heaven?''* What joy can Christmas, or Easter, or the altar, or the crucifix, or the Angelus Bell bring to me, so long as our Lord is angry with me and leaves me in darkness, and will not speak to me? The Festival-day is for me a day that reminds me more than other days that I am an exception and an outcast. And when I hear the preachers and the liturgy bidding me be glad, I grow impatient and sour, and accuse them of commanding impossibilities, and giving me no help to accomplish what is enjoined."

Let me here remind you, brethren, that I am speaking now not of those who lead a wicked life, nor yet of those who reach to high sanctity, but of some who live midway between holiness and wickedness, who habitually avoid all mortal sins, though they not unfrequently commit venial sins of different kinds when the temptation comes in their way. I am speaking of persons who, judged by the standard which men commonly apply, are pronounced to be good men and pious. I am speaking of a state of soul which may co-exist with many daily prayers and

* Tobias v. 12.

a regular frequentation of the sacraments—in fact, with what we commonly call a pious life.

Before proceeding to lay before you, as I promised to do, the different remedies that are suggested by spiritual men for this disease of depression and habitual desolation of soul, it may not be amiss to-day to refresh your remembrance of the evil that may be occasioned by it, unless we take pains to understand the disease and know the remedies to be applied. I am aware that our Lord has said, “Blessed are they that mourn,” that He Himself endured on Mount Calvary the agonising sense of separation from His Eternal Father, and that His most faithful servants have drunk their share of this most bitter chalice. I know, too, that in that very hour of special tenderness, when He said to His Apostles — “I will not call you servants, I have called you friends,”* “For you are they who have continued with Me in My temptations,”† He also said—“You shall lament and weep but the world shall rejoice.”‡ From these and very many other passages it is quite clear that there is a holy sadness that comes from above, and unites our souls to Jesus crucified and to His sorrowful Mother. All this I know. But it is equally true that there is another kind of depressing and hopeless sadness which does not come from God, and does not do His work, but, on the contrary, prepares the way for great sin and for ruin. Against this kind of inordinate and cheerless depression we cannot be too much on our guard. And it is of this kind of sadness we are now treating.

* St. John xv. 15. † St. Luke xxii. 28. ‡ St. John xvi. 20.

First, then, what does Holy Scripture teach us concerning it? Its effects are thus described in the Proverbs: "As a moth doth by a garment and a worm by the wood, so the sadness of man consumeth the heart.* Moth-eaten cloth, brethren, and worm-eaten wood, have no strength, are of no value, and a soul that is a prey to the disease of oppressive and hopeless sadness gradually loses its vital power, and becomes useless for all good. No wonder, then, that Ecclesiasticus warns us that "Sadness hath killed many, and there is no profit in it."† The same truth is expressed in other words elsewhere in the same book. It is well to hear them, as a truth, when thus repeated in various phrases, may, in one or other of its different dresses, arrest the attention of the mind. In the thirty-eighth chapter then, returning to this subject, the same inspired writer says: "Of sadness cometh death, and it overwhelmeth the strength; and the sorrow of the heart boweth down the neck."‡ Consequently, his earnest inculcation is—"Give not up thy soul to sadness, drive it far from thee. For joyfulness of heart is the life of a man, and a never-failing treasure of holiness. Therefore have pity on thy own soul. Gather up thy heart in God's holiness, and drive away sadness far from thee."§

If carefully you weigh these words, brethren, you perceive that sadness is described as fatal both to soul and body. It destroys the life of the body and the holiness of the soul. And now it will be useful

* Prov. xxv. 20.

† Eccclus. xxx. 25.

‡ Ecclus., xxxviii. 19.

§ *Ibid.*, xxx. 22, 23, xxxviii. 21.

to consider in detail the damage that this malady does to our souls.

1. In the first place, then, you will easily understand that in most cases it would hinder the soul from making any progress in the love of our Lord. For though we hear occasionally of instances of extraordinary and heroic courage, which seems prepared to cling to our Lord through every form of martyrdom, yet we must remember that our Blessed Saviour has spoken of days of trial so severe that, "unless they had been shortened for the sake of the elect, no flesh would be saved."* And therefore, if the providence of God must temper the wind, and measure mercifully the hour of trial even for His martyrs, we can understand how this very severe trial of inward depression and desolation, this feeling of guiltiness and loneliness and separation from our Creator, if it continues long and we see no prospect of emerging from this long darkness into the light of Heaven, may easily at last quite overthrow the virtue of those who have not the strength of martyrs.

There are those I know, who to the piteous cry of the soul suffering from this inward desolation will answer, "You must offer yourself to this cross for life." But how many are there who will accept this answer? And after all, is it the answer which our Blessed Lord would Himself give to those enduring this form of tribulation? For a small number of His heroic servants, He may perhaps have prepared by an exceptional dispensation a long dark night unbroken by sunlight, though even of this we may be doubtful.

* St. Matt. xxiv. 22.

But surely the teaching of our spiritual masters is, that as an ordinary rule He wishes the soul, as well as the outer world, to have its winter and its summer, its sunshine and its clouds, and not one long monotony of sadness. If then the sunshine never comes, if the sunshine is expected and does not appear, what wonder if, according to the proverb, "hope deferred afflicteth the soul."* This unnatural Egyptian darkness naturally engenders great dread and dismay, and as "perfect charity casts out fear,"† so on the other hand fear and dread, when long continued, will in most instances destroy love. I say in most instances, for the bright exceptions are well known. Of the glorious St. Francis de Sales, for example, it is recorded that during a season of spiritual darkness and anguish, when Heaven seemed closed for ever against him, he flung himself down upon the ground before a statue of our Lady, still shown in Paris, and cried out in the bitterness of his soul, "My God, my God! if I am not to love Thee in eternity, at least suffer me to love Thee here." This was the generous prayer of a great Saint, and it won for him the quick return of holy peace. But in many cases, if the soul comes to believe that Heaven is shut against it, the result is a reckless determination to taste all the pleasures of this earth, and its cry is, "If I am to have no Heaven hereafter, let me have my heaven now." The number of those whose will is prepared for all the gloomy pictures which the imagination can conjure up is very small indeed. You may probably have met with that

* Prov. xiii. 12.

† 1 St. John iv. 18.

ancient legend which tells us how St. Patrick, when baptising a King who stood barefoot for the ceremony, rested the pointed end of his crozier on the naked foot, and gradually, as the holy rite went on, inflicted a deep wound. The royal catechumen, we are told, imagined this to be a usual part of the Sacrament of Baptism, and manfully bore the pain till the paleness of his face at last betrayed his sufferings, and moved the Saint to heal by a miracle the wound he had unwittingly inflicted. Now, brethren, if this King's imagining had been correct, if baptism entailed the piercing of a foot or a hand, how many adults would be found bold enough to approach the sacred font! So too would it be if the spiritual life were always to be one long darkness. We might well exclaim with the Apostle, "Who can then be saved?"* The great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," would become practically an impossibility.

2. This will be made more clear if we remember that love, like every other virtue, must be kept alive by prayer. For the state of hopeless depression of which I am treating renders prayer distasteful both to God and to man. To man I say, since to persevere in prayer when we have in our souls a secret conviction that our Lord is displeased with us, and will not hear our cry, is so painful a task, that unless the days of this trial be abbreviated, weak nature will not, as a rule, persevere. Each day we listen more willingly to the voice that is ever whispering "are not such prayers mockery?" and at last we think it only good sense

* St. Mark x. 26.

and humility to cease to offer up what seems to be only a homage of the lips—very like to hypocrisy. It is true that we are taught by our Blessed Saviour to admire the faith and courage of the woman of Canaan, who, in spite of His apparent coldness and His rejection of her petition, persevered in her cry, saying, “Yea, Lord, for even the whelps eat of the crumbs.”* But after all, this was only the endurance of one rebuff, and a perseverance during a small part of an hour; but if day after day our Blessed Lord seems to observe and remember our iniquities, and to refuse in consequence to hear us or speak to us—alas! “Who shall stand it;”† “Who shall endure before the face of His cold?”‡

And these prayers, so irksome to us, may also become displeasing to God. For though we are earnestly recommended not to abandon prayer during “the time of clouds;” though our Lord says solemnly, “Ask and you shall receive,” and His Apostle adds, “If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, Who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not;”§ and though we all know that prayer made while we are struggling courageously with desolation is singularly meritorious, yet it is always true that this inward dreariness of soul has a tendency to shake hope and faith, and if it gain ground so far as to produce this bad effect, then any prayer becomes unsightly in the eyes of our God. For St. James, to the words just cited, adds this warning: “But let him ask in faith nothing wavering. For he

* St. Matt. xv. 27.

† Psalm cxxix. 3.

‡ Psalm cxlvii. 17.

§ St. James i. 5.

that wavereth is like a wave of the sea which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is inconstant in all his ways." You may perhaps ask me why one thus diffident in prayer is called double-minded? There is a reason for the reproach, brethren, since, on the one hand, by kneeling down to prayer he professes hope; while on the other, by allowing the chilling and paralysing thought that God will not hear his prayer to spread over his soul, he denies his hope; and thus, being inconstant even during the moments of prayer, and not finding grace in prayer, is inconstant in all his ways.

It is well then, dear brethren, to understand and to bear in mind that hopelessness or depression—when it is now no longer a mere temptation against which we struggle hard, but an habitual state in which we acquiesce—is not only very painful to us, but very troublesome to God. I use this word troublesome, remembering the answer which Isaias the Prophet made to King Achaz, who would not ask, as he was bidden to do, for a sign from Heaven of God's mercy, but said with apparent humility, "I will not ask; I will not tempt God." The Prophet sternly rebuked him, saying, "Is it a small matter for you to be grievous to men, that you are grievous to my God also?"* When we will not hope in the mercy of our God, brethren, we must be very troublesome and very grievous to Him, for we simply render void all Christ's work of redemption. This will

* Isaias vii. 13.

appear more clear to you if you call to mind that when treating of the sin of heresy and unbelief we warn men that it is more grievous than the sins of sensuality and anger, and other sins which we consider very heinous; and to make this intelligible to them, we point out that so long as faith remains in the soul there is always a good hope that the evil caused by other sins will be repaired. If faith survives, the chances are that a valid absolution will one day set the sinful soul free from its slavery. But if unbelief gains possession, of what use can the sacraments be? The Cross of Christ is now indeed made void. If I may use a comparison—by gluttony and anger and covetousness and impurity the blossoms and fruits on the tree are blighted, but heresy and unbelief destroy the root, and thus sacrifice the future as well as the present harvest. Now, brethren, hope is the twin sister of true faith. They are so like that it is often hard to distinguish one from the other. If hope is destroyed, our Lord's work of mercy is baffled almost as thoroughly as when unbelief sets in. Few among us, I imagine, sufficiently study the sin of Cain and Judas. The words of the first murderer, "My sin is greater than that I may hope for pardon," and the words of Judas, "I have sinned, betraying the blood of this just Man," do not on their surface display all the wickedness which lies beneath them. It would be a useful task to apply our souls to both these sentences, in order, with God's help, to understand the nature of a sin against hope, and to realise how exceedingly troublesome we become to our Creator and our

Redeemer when we will not hope. For the present it will suffice if I add to what I have already said, that, besides destroying love and hindering prayer, it adds on a fatal poison to all the sins which we have the misfortune to commit.

3. I observe then, with St. Augustine, that it was not the treason of Judas that sealed his doom, but the act of despair that followed. It is worth our while to notice this saying, for it contains this most valuable truth—that our unseen enemies, when they tempt us to anger, or to sensuality, have never completed their work till, after the sin of anger or sensuality, they now add a second suggestion which whispers into our soul that our cause is now finished, that we have flung away our birthright, that efforts are now useless. Observe, brethren, I say that this second temptation to despair, though as a rule it follows close upon the first temptation to anger or impurity, is yet something completely distinct and separate from the first temptation and the first sin. As we know that faith and good works may be separated; that a certain share of faith may exist in the soul though good works do not grow out of it, so in like manner bad works and despair can be separated—they need not as a matter of course go together. A sin of anger need not necessarily destroy hope; it is possible to yield to a temptation of anger or pride or sensuality, and yet not yield to the temptation to despair that follows close upon it.

I consider it most important, brethren, to bear this truth in mind. For if a man remembers when he has been betrayed into a sin—were it even a

mortal sin—that all is not lost, that he can retrieve himself, he checks at once the victorious enemy. The harm done is as yet comparatively little, unless Satan can now procure a consent to the suggestion that all is lost. Unless this second victory be gained, the enemies of God and man have achieved very little. What I am saying, brethren, will gain light from the words of David, “Who can understand sins?”* There are many mysteries in sin ; we understand little about them. One mystery among the rest, brethren, is the different effect which the same sin seems to produce on different souls. In one soul it quickly breeds despair and leads to speedy ruin ; in another prepares the way for such bright virtues that, with the Holy Church, you cry out—*Felix culpa!* Happy sin, for instance, of St. Peter, which produced a humility that was safe on the most glorious throne that man can occupy on earth—the throne of Christ’s Vicegerent. Yes, happy sins of childhood and of manhood ! if in the end, because I formerly sinned much I now love much, according to the merciful rule laid down by our compassionate Lord. How comes it then, brethren, that one loves because he has sinned ; and another, because he has committed the same sin, dies hating his Creator ? Is not the explanation partly to be found in this truth that I have been presenting to you, that though two men commit in the same hour a theft, a murder, or an act of sacrilege, or any other crime, it does not follow that they both consent to the thought of despair that comes before the mind after the first sin is com-

* Psalm xviii. 13.

mitted. A sinner may, then, by his sin of anger or impurity, have struck a blow against God's authority, perhaps impugned God's wisdom, denied practically that God's loveliness is sufficient to content his soul, but still he has not as yet by his act completely destroyed as far as in him lies the mercy of his Creator; and so long as the mercy of God still lives within him it is a power which can create over again the soul that is mortally wounded, and repair the ruin.

From what I have said then, brethren, you see that excessive depression, or a want of hope, first hinders us from loving our God; and secondly, prevents prayer, by which we might arrive at love and all other graces; and thirdly, adds on to other sins a poison without which they would be comparatively harmless. I will only add that this state of hopeless depression in a special way prepares the way for those two vices from which the Holy Church begs of our Lady to deliver us, saying: *Mites fac et castos*, "Make us meek and chaste"—I mean the vice of anger and the vice of sensuality. For when the mind is soured by discouragement it magnifies small crosses and contradictions, and is predisposed to anger. On the other hand, having no joy or consolation within, and seeing no prospect of tasting that sweetness which the Holy Spirit promises, the desolate soul, unable to endure its misery, is strongly inclined to go and seek contentment in the husks of swine which this earth offers, and instead of living with the eye upraised to Cavalry, to the tabernacle, and to Heaven, is content to wallow in the mire of

this world, renouncing for the mess of pottage the never-ending bliss with Christ Jesus which is our birthright.

Such, then, brethren, is some of the evil which depression may work in our souls. And in the following instructions we will consider the remedies which are proposed to cure this very dangerous disorder.

LECTURE III.*

DESOLATION—ITS CHARACTER. SOME REMEDIES.

ON this very holy and very joyful Festival, brethren, which might with propriety be called the birthday of the Church, we make an appeal to you according to custom, to move you to assist in providing for the service of the altar a music such as the great Apostle of the Blessed Sacrament, St. Thomas Aquinas, asks for in his glorious hymn—

Sit laus plena sit sonora,
Sit jucunda sit decora.

He wishes for an anthem full yet graceful, sweet yet loud and glorious. And if all the first-fruits and the best things of creation ought to be for our Creator, is it not especially desirable that the wonderful power of music should serve our Lord in His holy temple and do His work? Is it not a signal triumph for the princes of darkness when they can bring together an exquisite harmony to give effect to some immoral story or obscene representation in the theatre, while around the altar of the Blessed Sacrament there is no one to sing the songs of Sion with becoming skill? Among all the arts and accomplishments given to

* Delivered on Pentecost Sunday, on which day the annual collection for the Choir was made.

man is there any other that is so much at home in the Church as music is? And the harmony of Church psalmody, brethren, is in more ways than one emblematic of Pentecost. For the sound of many voices, and of the thousand tones of the sacred organ, blended in one delightful chord, reminds us strongly of that wonderful effect of the Whitsuntide grace which brought many hearts and many opposite characters together, and fused them into a heavenly unity of peace and charity. And, again, the voice of sacred music is like the voice of the Apostles, intelligible to men of all nations. It is a common language, which, to a certain degree, undoes the effect of the curse which scattered the presumptuous builders of the tower of Babel. It is, then, a seasonable thought to set before you to-day that the holy altar as it deserves our sweetest incense, so merits also the richest and most soul-stirring harmony that man can devise. And if there is in the world a spot where there is a special reason for surrounding the blessed altar with the best things of this earth, that spot is this city, where the altar of Christ has to stand in such close competition with the rival shrines of the princes of this world of darkness. If the altar of the Blessed Sacrament were not in the midst of us, then, perhaps, the theatre and the ball-room, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, would not be quite as great a deformity as they are now, when Satan is able to go up to the throne of God, boasting—"I have gone round about the earth and walked through it,"* and everywhere find men

* Job i. 7.

more generous and magnificent in my service than they are in the service of Christ.

However, brethren, to resume the subject of these instructions, let the anthem be as full and as becoming, as sweet and as glorious as St. Thomas could desire, still it will not, any more than the sound of the Angelus Bell, bring peace and gladness to the soul of one labouring under the disease of habitual depression and despondency which we are considering. To-day I shall begin to set before you the different remedies proposed by spiritual masters for this sickness of the soul, which is so very common, and becomes so dangerous if neglected. And no one remedy is perhaps so efficacious as a good knowledge of the character of the malady and of its chief symptoms. First, then, let me ask you to listen to the description of it, left to us by one whom God allowed to experience all its bitter pains, in order that afterwards he might be a physician to many sufferers.

I. The technical name, brethren, among ascetical writers for this malady of the soul is desolation, and St. Ignatius of Loyola thus describes its effects. He calls it a darkness that overspreads the soul, like to that which hung over Calvary during our Saviour's Passion; and with this darkness comes naturally trouble of mind and agitation of different kinds. At one time a weariness of all things spiritual, a strong inclination downwards for all things of this world—its amusements and its pursuits. At another time a succession of temptations to sin, which harass and distress and frighten the soul, and in the end, if care

be not taken, would incline us to become reckless, and would make perseverance in God's service seem impossible. In this state of confusion and struggle the love of God seems an unreal phantom. Hope, too, seems to fade entirely away, or nearly so. The psalm lies before me ; I read it, but understand nothing and feel nothing. The soul is dispirited and cowardly and slothful, and dreads an effort, and feels as if it must be quite guilty, and separated from its Creator.

We shall understand this malady better if for a moment we consider the opposite state of soul which spiritual writers describe under the name of consolation, and which, like desolation, comes and goes by God's permission, just as the weather changes in the outer world by His permission and appointment. When, then, the sunny hour of consolation unexpectedly arrives, the soul is surprised and gladdened to find how easily it can now love its Creator. The cold ice seems suddenly melted ; the stream of spiritual thoughts and affections flows again ; the words of the prayer and the psalm seem all to be realities which my heart intends and means. Gold and silver now, and equipages and merry scenes, do not fascinate as they did, I am in great peace without them. And if they are offered to me I cannot help asking, before I accept them—"Will they bring me nearer to my Creator?" The Passion of our Lord is now the one real romance that is dear to my soul, and the altar of the Blessed Sacrament a home and a resting-place. It is not now resentment, it is not now disappointment, that draws tears from the eyes. If they flow

they come from the same source as St. Peter's tears, or Magdalen's, because the soul is thinking of Christ crucified. Heaven also now seems a reality and very near, and love for God and charity for men not only appear possible, but if experience has not already schooled us, we are inclined to imagine fondly that from henceforth nothing but fervent love for our Lord and for all dear to Him is a possibility. A great and lasting peace seems established between the soul and its Creator. Perchance St. Peter was misled by the happiness of such a visitation when he said : "Although all shall be scandalised in Thee, yet not I."* St. Peter had not then learned by experience and the light of the Holy Spirit to understand the words of holy Job, that "Man never continueth in the same state."†

The fact is then, brethren, that both these states called by spiritual writers consolation and desolation, are transient visitations from above, permitted by God's providence, and to a certain degree quite beyond our control, but regulated most carefully and most mercifully by our Father in Heaven to meet our wants, provided we are not through our own folly "exiled from the eternal providence,"‡ as the people of Egypt were during the long darkness.

II. This is the reason why the first answer given to the distressed sufferer whose case we imagined in the first of these illustrations was, "Be of good courage, it is a passing cloud." This answer did not work a cure in the case supposed, but still it is a true and a wise word, and often suffices to dispel

* St. Mark xiv. 29. † Job xiv. 2. ‡ Wisdom xvii. 2.

the darkness of the soul. Let us therefore consider it a little.

It is then of great importance to remember that neither consolation nor desolation is a natural condition of the soul resulting merely from temperament or health. Consolation is not a gift made over to man for the term of his natural life, as the gift of memory ordinarily is, or the gift of a good understanding. It is, rather, like the manna, a gift that is sent down from above at intervals when it is wanted. We cannot have it when we will; we must depend on our Father in Heaven. As an ordinary rule, if a man have a good understanding to-day, you may reckon on his still possessing the same advantage to-morrow. Otherwise all compacts and transactions would be dangerous and insecure; you could not depend on any one. But because a man abounds in spiritual light and consolation at morning, it by no means follows that he will be enjoying these same heavenly delights when evening comes. So too of desolation; it is not, if I may use a familiar phrase, one of the fixtures of the soul, and, therefore, because it is present when you go out, you must not conclude that it is sure to be with you when you come home. If a man is irascible at the beginning of the week, or vain, or cowardly, these habits, which are become in some degree a nature, will in all probability live through this week and many more. But as seasons of desolation and consolation are in great measure occasioned from without by the action of unseen spirits, friendly or hostile to the soul, the very instant that a good Angel or a bad angel, in obedience

to the watchful providence of God, ceases to act on the soul, and withdraws, that instant a great change for better or for worse is felt internally. Hence it is that spiritual directors venture sometimes to say so confidently to those terrified by the prospect of a life to be spent in gloom and depression, "It is a passing cloud."

1. This is a truth well worthy of notice, and to be remembered by all who are anxious to be victorious in our spiritual warfare. Some part of our inclination to sin proceeds from our own corruption become, perhaps, more virulent through past excesses. This amount of passion and disposition to sin we carry about with us all day, and every day feel its effects, whether the tempter be near us or not, as often as some occasion presents itself to awaken our passions. And in the case of persons who have long neglected their souls and indulged their bad inclinations, this tendency to sin may have become so strong, that the unseen spirits of evil have comparatively no work to do. Now such inclinations, which have thus become fixed and habitual in the soul, will not, without a miracle of grace, change on a sudden. But besides this inclination to sin, which is inborn, or settled by a long prescription within the soul, there are temptations suggested from without by evil spirits. In what particular way good Angels and bad angels reach our souls, we know not; but we are certain beyond all doubt that both good and bad spirits watch us and visit us from time to time, and have means of communicating with our souls. Could we but distinguish the suggestions of these unseen spirits

from our own thoughts, it would be very much more easy to spurn the suggestion of the father of lies, and to yield to the counsels of our good Angel; but we live ordinarily in so great a dissipation of mind, that our souls become, to use our Lord's similitude, like an open highway—a good Angel may pass and a wicked spirit follow, and both remain unnoticed, and their suggestions lie undistinguished among the mass of our own thoughts. But if we would only notice what passes in our soul with some of that care which an invalid devotes to the state of his body, we should soon observe that whenever an evil spirit comes to add his suggestions to our natural corrupt inclinations—and they are more busy with us than usual during the time of desolation—the temptation is indeed sharper and more violent, but if resisted passes suddenly away, leaving no trace behind. The foul spirit of evil is, as we read in the Book of Tobias, scared completely away, and bound by the good Angel who protects us. If we could but bear in mind this truth—that very violent temptations are commonly not altogether our own inclination, but a passing assault from an enemy without, who is subject to the law, “Resist the devil and he will fly from you,”* this thought would give us great courage to make a good fight. For the notion that the temptation troubling us is a craving of our own nature that must give pain till it is gratified is what chiefly disheartens us, and makes us prone to yield.

Here then, brethren, we have one valuable remedy

* St. James iv. 7.

which we ought to store up for the hour of need. That state of depression which is called desolation is not, as insanity sometimes is, or gout, an inherited inborn misery from which there is no escape. It is rather a visit from a very tiresome neighbour, which, if the worst come to the worst, must come to an end soon if you choose to be moderately sensible and to use the means which are at your command—"Resist the devil and he will fly from you." This heaviness of soul, this sense of guilt, this uncheered wretchedness, if it were really what it seems to be—a part of yourself that must live on with you—would be so heavy a burden, that without a miraculous support from Heaven you would sink under it. But when once you know from the teaching of the Saints, that you are only under the effect of what I may call a dense mist or vapour, which the spirits of darkness are permitted to spread over your soul for a little while, and that as soon as they see some courage and resolution in your soul, they are glad enough to fly away, far more afraid of the Christian than he is of them, the case is greatly altered, and desolation loses in great measure its terrors.

2. We have then the assurance of the great masters in the spiritual warfare, that peace and consolation will soon come back if we do not lose heart, and are diligent in helping ourselves by prayer and penance and such other means within our reach. And we are further assured that we do quite right while under the pain of desolation of soul to cry out loudly from the depths of our distress, "Have mercy on me, O God, and restore unto me the joy of Thy salva-

tion.”* I mention this because I am aware that there are many who have interpreted the words of spiritual writers in the sense that to desire consolation is a want of generosity, and that we ought to be prepared for a dreary desolation that never is to be cheered on this side of the grave. I say then that I do not think that the most approved teachers of our souls ever tell us to look forward to such a gloomy prospect. The holy author of the *Imitation* writes that it is commonly our fault that we do not more often taste of spiritual gladness. St. Ignatius of Loyola tells us that when in desolation we may always expect to see the sunshine return to us soon, if we use the proper means to bring it back. And are we not taught by the Gospel narrative that in dealing with his servants God follows, as I have said, the same plan as in regulating the seasons, sending light and darkness, cold and heat, storms and gentle dews in a merciful rotation? Even if it could be shown that with His chosen and most courageous servants He sometimes deals otherwise, and prolongs without alleviation their interior desolation; still even then we should have to bear in mind the classification pointed out in that collect of the Church in which we pray: “O God, Who art wonderful in Thy Saints, be merciful to us.” We who are very grateful for being adopted to a bountiful share of God’s more ordinary mercies, cannot apply to ourselves canons and rules that might suit wonderful sanctity. But after all, what sanctity is higher than the sanctity of the Holy Family at Bethlehem, and how did Divine Provi-

* Psalm l. 14.

dence deal with them?—was there not an alternation of sunshine and storms? Gabriel brought gladness; but quickly there followed the doubts of St. Joseph, his anguish, and our Lady's patient sorrow. The shepherds, and the magi, and the hosts of Heaven poured out anthems of gladness; but soon followed the wail of the mothers of Bethlehem around the crib of Jesus, to turn joy into mourning. And so life went on, not a perpetual uncheered passion, nor yet a continuance of the joys of Thabor, but change and alternation, regulated by Him Who guards Israel, and never sleeps or slumbers.

And now we pass on, brethren, to the second word of comfort addressed to the sufferer whose case we are studying—"Be of good comfort, for gold and silver are tried in the fire of humiliation."* And this medicine also proved ineffectual. And yet, brethren, there is in this inspired word a healing balm, that has often soothed and cured this most distressing anguish of the soul. For one of the thoughts that makes desolation so heavy a burthen is that it must necessarily be a chastisement and a mark of God's severe displeasure. We take it for granted that such weariness and darkness as we experience, and so great a disinclination for good, could not possibly exist had not our Creator gone far away from us, and left behind only a curse. Once persuade such a sufferer that he is not doomed, that there is no proof that he is accursed or guilty, that he may still be very dear to God—and the sting is taken out of his anguish. Well then, brethren, we are all prone to judge hastily

that suffering must always be a chastisement of sin. Did not the Apostles, when they saw the man born blind, at once assume without any hesitation, and as a matter of course, that one of the two must have sinned, either this man or his parents, if not both? It is a chief article in the creed of this country that prosperity is an infallible sign of Heaven's favour. Often, then, as we have heard it inculcated, still we forget it in our hour of trial, that our Blessed Saviour Himself, the only-begotten Son of God, cried out from His Cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" In Him assuredly there was no sin, no stain, no spot, nothing but the unsullied glory of infinite goodness and holiness. And yet it was so arranged by the power and wisdom of His Eternal Father that His Sacred Humanity should feel the pangs of separation from its Creator. A veil was drawn that for a time seemed to separate the Father from the suffering soul of His well-beloved Son. If, then, our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ was thus tried in the fire of humiliation, it is no wonder that His Saints have passed through the same refining flame. Sometimes they are subjected to this heavy tribulation, because on them, as on Him, "the Lord hath laid the iniquities of us all."* Their anguish is winning mercy for others too ready to sin, but not ready to undergo penance for their sin. Sometimes, again, the holy and chosen servants of God are allowed to feel the sense and the pain of guilt, and to believe for the time that they are under God's displeasure, that they may learn by experience what

* Isaías liii. 6.

books and sermons never could imprint deeply enough on their soul—the truth of those loving words which the Church so often repeats at this season :

Sine tuo numine,
Nihil est in homine—

“Without Thee, O God, and Thy life-giving Spirit, there is nothing in man but nothingness, and worse than nothingness.”

When God withdraws for a time the gladness of His sensible presence, we need no other teaching to prove to us how low and weak and helpless we are, and that evil inclinations well out naturally from our diseased soul, as corruption from a running wound. One, who has thus found out that he is “encompassed with infirmity,” will be by this consciousness preserved from self-complacency when peace comes back. He will say, as the welcome tranquillity returns—“This is the change of the right hand of the Most High ;”* “My heart is not elated, O Lord, my eyes are not lifted up with pride.”†

Again, a soul thus tutored and made perfect in infirmity will not be scandalised by the infirmity of another. How would it be possible for one who had never felt the pain of desolation to be a safe guide to those afflicted by a malady that looks so like wickedness? We are specially cautioned by the experienced Saints that they who have to bear this burden of desolation have enough weight to carry, without being still further weighed down and crushed by harsh reproofs and the exclamations of Pharisaical

* Psalm lxxvi. 11.

† *Ibid.*, cxxx. 1.

righteousness, as if their suffering were a crime. And yet how natural it would be, if we had never ourselves been schooled by desolation, to be scandalised and shocked when we meet with it, and to exclaim—as the people of Malta when they saw the viper bite St. Paul—“Undoubtedly this man is a murderer.”* But when once we know that our Creator is accustomed to send this chastisement to those He loves, and not always for their own sins, but that others may find mercy, and their own virtue be made perfect in infirmity, and in order that, having less of comforts here, they may be nearer to Him for all eternity, we begin to look on the desolate as a Christian looks on the poor, with respect and a holy reverence, and afterwards, when desolation comes to our own souls, it is much more bearable.

Here then, brethren, are three thoughts which it would be well to store up for use against the evil day. They will serve you well when “the time of affliction comes,” and those hours of desolation of which you will say, “They please me not;” “When the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return.”† If we are not instructed and warned beforehand, when these clouds overspread, and we find ourselves apparently helpless for good and given up to evil inclinations, the thought which is so assiduously suggested—that this melancholy state is to be our normal condition through life—is so dispiriting, that it is not a wonder that, in the words of Ecclesiastes, “the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men stagger,”‡ and we con-

* Acts xxviii. 4. † Eccles. xii. 2. ‡ *Ibid.*, xii. 3.

sider it as proved by experience that we must needs change all our good resolves and give up the hope we cherished of leading a fervent life. May our good Angel, then, remind us in that hour of trial—

In the first place, that in this time of desolation we are not ourselves, we are not in our normal condition, but that the moment has come when we must, as St. Paul expresses it, “wrestle with the spirits of wickedness,”* who therefore, for a little while, are permitted to lay their unclean hands upon our souls, and make us feel as if their wickedness was our own.

Secondly, that these spirits are not strong. They are already defeated, crushed, and therefore very cowardly, and must fly if we resist them. Consequently, that it rests with us to ensure that this tribulation shall be no more than a passing cloud.

Thirdly, that we are not necessarily guilty because left for a time to be besmeared, if I may so speak, with the slime of the serpent. Satan was permitted to come close to the Holy of Holies, the Divine Son of God, and lay his hand on Him; and the gold and the silver of holiness is only made more bright by having its surface disfigured for a while.

These three thoughts, and others which I shall add in the following instructions, will help very much to give us courage and patience in the hour of desolation, and to make us see that it is not impossible to carry out the rule laid down by Ecclesiasticus for souls undergoing this severe trial: “In time of clouds make not haste. Humble thy heart and endure.

* Ephes. vi. 12.

Wait on God with patience. In thy sorrow endure, in thy humiliation keep patience.”*

And now, brethren, another spiritual friend who heard the story of our sufferer, suggested an explanation of his sorrow by asking him whether he owed money. On this subject I will only say that debts and money difficulties are so great an obstacle to peace of soul, that as the Psalmist prays—“Save me, O Lord, from the calumnies of men, that I may keep Thy commandments,”† we too might with good reason make a prayer like to this—“Save me, O Lord, from debts, that I may be able in tranquillity of soul to work out my salvation.”

* Eccclus. ii. 2, 3, 4.

† Psalm cxviii. 134.

LECTURE IV.

OTHER REMEDIES AGAINST DESOLATION.

THE Psalmist, brethren, speaking of persons long estranged from God, makes use of this comparison to describe their state : " Their madness is according to the likeness of a serpent, like the deaf asp that stoppeth her ears, which will not hear the voice of the charmer, nor of the wizard who charmeth wisely."* The case that we are studying during this month is not that of one who from wilful obstinacy refuses to hear the voice of the charmer, but of one who, from some cause or causes unexplained, does not hear the soothing and enchanting voice of his Creator, or at least imagines that his Creator never speaks words of consolation and grace to his soul. " The Angelus Bell," he says, " and the Festivals of the Church, the words of Holy Scripture, or of pious prayers, all fail to bring gladness of heart to me." So that our Blessed Lord's " plentiful redemption " seems in his case—if we accept his story—to be from some unknown cause a failure. It is hard, however, to assent to this conclusion ; we are obliged rather to take it for granted that there is some mistake in the account given to us, some misapprehension on the part of the sufferer.

* Psalm lvii. 5, 6.

For on the one hand we cannot doubt that our Creator and our Redeemer wishes to attract the heart of man. The inspired words, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee,"* are too positive and too infallible to allow us to hesitate. I think that we cannot deny that our Blessed Saviour planned the details of His life and death with the view of attracting our hearts. Men sometimes ask why God does not interfere by some exercise of His power to prevent sin. The day is to come, brethren, when we shall understand the whole of His plan, and, according to the words of the Psalm, "He will overcome when He is judged."† We shall all acknowledge that the system He pursued towards us was wise and good, and infinitely merciful. Judas will own that our Lord took infinite pains to win him back from his treason. Now one chief part of our Saviour's plan He Himself reveals to us in these words: "If I shall be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to Myself."‡ All the cruel details of His sacred Passion were not needed to satisfy the justice of His Father, but every touching circumstance of this scene of love, stronger than death in its most terrible form, was needed to attract the hearts of men. Our Saviour knew well the ruinous influence of that power which Holy Scripture calls the "bewitching of trifling," and therefore He prepared in Bethlehem and on Mount Calvary scenes of surpassing loveliness, to draw away our eyes from the illusions of this world. If then He has the will

* Jerem. xxxi. 3. † Psalm l. 6. ‡ St. John xii. 32.

to charm and attract us, how is it that He fails to do so? For is it not quite certain, on the other hand, that He has knowledge and skill enough to draw us? He is "the charmer who charmeth wisely." No one can understand all the wants and cravings of our nature as well as He does, for He created our souls and our bodies, and understood thoroughly, and with the most complete foreknowledge intended, all those dispositions and inclinations which belong to our nature. And if He sometimes forbids us to gratify our inclinations, it is not that He either made any mistake in our creation, or repents of His arrangement, or grudges us pleasure or happiness, but simply because having created us capable of an infinite enjoyment, He cannot consent to our accepting as our portion something small, and low, and short-lived that is put before us by enemies who wish us no good. As then we cannot believe either that our Lord does not wish to make us happy, or does not know how to content us; when we meet with an enduring depression and desolation of soul which destroys all relish for our Blessed Lord, and His Gospel, and His religion, we can only say that there is some poison at work upon the powers of the soul, and then use all diligence to find out and remove the cause of so serious a mischief.

I. Well then, brethren, the spiritual sufferer whose malady we are considering, when for the fourth time he exposed his sorrows, received the encouraging answer, "Be of good heart, you do love your God truly and heartily." This answer did not satisfy any better than those already considered. Yet it well

deserves attention, and may prove most useful in the time of desolation. This then I think, brethren, is quite certain, that as there are some men living in a state of presumptuous delusion, to whom, when they begin to recount their services at the judgment-seat, saying, "Have we not prophesied in Thy name, and done many miracles?" our Lord will be forced to answer, "Amen, I never knew you, depart from Me;"* so on the other hand there will be many who, on entering into eternity, will be overwhelmed with astonishment and gladness to find that they are judged far more leniently by our Lord than they were judged on earth by themselves. I speak of such as would not venture now to say to our Saviour with St. Peter, "O Lord thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee;" yet He will say to them after death, "Well done, good and faithful servant," "You are of those who have continued with Me in My temptations."† A French writer introduces into his scene a plain, simple man, who is surprised and pleased at finding out late in life that he can speak prose, and has been doing so all his life. He had often heard of prose, but never for a moment imagined that what he uttered deserved to be called prose, or to have a name. Well, brethren, even so, ineffably delighted, it seems to me, will many be after death who are here heavy-hearted, when they find accepted as true love by our Lord a kind of service that they never dared themselves to call by so holy a name. And God grant that on the other hand there may not be many whose ruin was

* St. Matt. vii. 23.

† St. Luke xxii. 28.

helped on by a mistaken notion that they did not and could not love their God! For if we are told that an army that fancies itself conquered is virtually conquered, and will run away; so in spiritual warfare a man who is persuaded that he does not love his God may very easily at last throw up his allegiance in despair, and become an enemy. And if mistaken ideas on the subject of love do not actually lead us to recklessness and despair, they may at least very much chill affection for our Lord, and prevent devotedness and generosity from growing in us. How many there are whose hearts would expand and be ready for sacrifices if an Angel from Heaven once assured them that they are God's friends, and acceptable to Him! It is then of great moment to have correct ideas with regard to the love of God.

First then, brethren, if we are free from grievous sin—however dull and heavy our souls may be—still we are in the state of grace, that is to say, in God's friendship. We are not His enemies; His love is really in our hearts, and if we die in this state, though we may have to be saved by fire,* still we are sure to be with our God for ever. Now thanks to the most merciful dispensation of our Lord, we can know with tolerable certainty whether we are defiled with grievous sin or not. For He has bound Himself by a compact to ratify the judgment of His Church on earth. And as we know the mind of Holy Church regarding sinners and their forgiveness, we can pronounce in a great number of cases, without much fear of mistake, that the Holy Church, the Bride of our

* 1 Cor. iii. 13.

Lord, would wish the sinner to be absolved, and therefore we can rightly conclude that an absolution is also pronounced in Heaven. Such souls then, rightly absolved from grievous sin, and reinstated in grace, love our Blessed Lord. They would do well, no doubt, to frame a prayer after the fashion of that humble prayer of the father in the Gospel, "I believe, Lord, help my unbelief," saying,* "I love Thee, my God, teach me to love Thee more and more;" but still they ought to believe and to say it, that they do love their God; and it does them incalculable mischief if they gradually acquiesce in the suggestion sedulously whispered into their ears by the spirit of lies—that they have no love for their Creator.

Secondly, then, the fact is that there is an infinite number of degrees in the intensity and ardour of our love, and there is also a very great variety in the forms in which love expresses itself, according as temperament, and formed habits, and other circumstances vary. One will be more demonstrative, another more reserved; one is easily melted into tears, another has none to shed; one pours out words, another is speechless. These are accidental circumstances which do not prove that love is great or little. Nay, even the same person may within the space of a few hours vary very much in the way of expressing love, although no real internal change has taken place. Children cheered by a play-day, and men by a little wine, become more expansive, but do they really love more? On the other hand, a mother who has been watching for many nights by a sick-bed

* St. Mark ix. 23.

can no longer be very animated, or show so many outward symptoms of tenderness as she did when her strength was fresh and her animal spirits not exhausted, but her love may be not weaker now, but more true and more devoted than ever.

For this is a third principle to be borne in mind, that love is not always comfortable and smiling; otherwise our Blessed Lord could never have been, as He was on the night of His love, full of sadness, and disgust, and fear. We must measure love as we would measure the power of a vessel at sea, making due allowance for all the different causes that are clogging and obstructing its movements. A ship holding its ground in presence of a gale may be more powerful than one wafted rapidly by a breeze. As then our Blessed Lord, at His Last Supper, pointed out a faithful observance of His law as the test of love, saying, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me," a man who without tenderness or emotion, or the luxury of consolation, meets reluctance and many struggles of nature, and does the will of his Creator—in heaviness of heart perhaps, but still faithfully and efficiently—may have a most real and strong love for his God, which will put on a much better outward appearance as soon as the sluggishness of the body, or the pressure of business, or whatever other circumstances at present weigh down the soul are removed.

If then we would adopt our Blessed Lord's rule, that we must judge of the tree by its fruit, and measure our love of our Creator, not by the presence

or absence of certain fallible symptoms, but rather as a jury of orthodox theologians would judge us, by the fruits we bear—that is to say, by the fidelity with which we keep the commandments, and by the sacrifice of feeling and inclination which we make for the cause of our Master—our souls might be less desolate, and more at peace.

But it is more difficult than might be imagined at first sight to convince ourselves thoroughly of this truth—that love and enjoyment do not necessarily go together. It is a very wide-spread and very deep-seated error that confounds together love and pleasure. In ordinary domestic life, and in romances, persons who are looking mainly to their own enjoyment often say that they have strong love; and in spiritual life we are very apt to be craving after the luxury of devotional feelings when we imagine that we are only seeking after fervent love.* It is then a lesson much needed, that love and selfishness are utterly opposed—that whereas selfishness is always active to increase its own pleasure and profit, love is ever busy to give profit and pleasure to another. We may form a truer conception and picture of love in our minds if we have fallen in with a family so happy as to possess a faithful and devoted servant, attached to them by long years of kindly intercourse.

* Piety, blended with a due care for self, is happily illustrated in the following Continental anecdote. A good Curé is overheard in his day-dream planning his own martyrdom. “I have said my Mass most piously, and made my thanksgiving most fervently. I then take my breakfast, namely, a cup of chocolate and a fresh egg. In comes the Turk, and says, ‘Deny your faith.’ ‘Never!’ I cry; ‘never!’ He strikes my head off at one blow. I go straight to Heaven. Alleluia.”

We see such a servant forgetting his comforts, having very little thought of his interests, glad when the family are happy, distressed at their sorrows. How different is this humble and loving devotedness from that disguised selfishness which is profuse in manifestations, provided they cost nothing and are gratifying to self!

II. And this brings me to another answer given to the melancholy mourner who wanders about in search of consolation. It was said to him: "Incredulous generation, you seek a sign and it will not be given." And in this answer also there is contained a valuable truth akin to the one I have just set before you, and useful to allay the anguish caused by desolation. We are often, then, reminded in the Gospel that we are to live by faith and walk by faith, and we are often upbraided for being men of little faith. And if we begin to examine what these expressions mean, and to try to understand what it is to live by faith, we are told by our Lord that "Blessed are they who believe though they have not seen,"* and by St. Paul that faith is a dim, obscure vision,† "The evidence of things that appear not."‡ If we weigh these and other passages, and then call to mind what happens when we are in the presence of the Ever Blessed Eucharist, that our senses for the most part not only give us no assistance, but would mislead us if we followed them; and what happens at the font of baptism, where a most precious grace is conferred, of which we cannot detect any trace or symptom in the body of the infant—we learn at last

* St. John xx. 29. † 1 Cor. xiii. 12. ‡ Heb. xi. 1.

this lesson, that, as we have to believe without seeing, so we may have to believe without feeling. Our Lord is described during His Passion as one in whom there is no beauty, no comeliness, no sightliness, and "His look," the Prophet writes, "was, as it were, hidden."* The true servant of Christ Jesus may resemble his Master in this point. There may not be much manifestation of the loveliness of grace in the mere outward parts of his nature ; his feelings and his body and his imagination may show no signs of God's presence within ; and yet the understanding may have sufficient light, and the will courage and strength, to act rightly. And the eye of God does not judge us by our surface, but rather by this more hidden aspect of our souls.

We have, then, often need to be reminded that there is a great difference between faith and feeling ; that the followers of Christ have often to believe without feeling, to be contrite in the sacred tribunal of penance without feeling, to receive the Blessed Sacrament without feeling, and to love without feeling ; yes, and possibly to die glorious martyrs without any very comfortable feelings. For when the body has been cruelly abused by torments, unless some miracle intervenes, there cannot well be what we commonly call pleasant feelings, or that kind of cheeriness which is the result of animal spirits. All the pain and discomfort of suffering and extreme weariness may be there, and yet there may be love in the highest degree, love strong as death.

Happy the man, then, brethren, who endeavours

* Isaias liii. 3.

always to guide himself by faith rather than by his feelings. If in our intercourse with men we do not judge them by the eye, by their dress, by their titles, by their talent, by their beauty of body, but as God judges them, by their supernatural gifts; if, again, in our choice of creatures we are not dazzled by a glittering surface, but with the eye of faith select what is precious in God's sight, what will be treasure in eternity—then, when we come to judge of our own spiritual state it will be easier for us to pay less heed to our feelings, and to be concerned only about the healthy or unhealthy condition of our faith.

III. And what I have been saying, brethren, will be better understood if we now consider for a few moments one other answer given to the spiritual patient whom we are studying. When he had told his sorrowful tale he was asked the question: "How is your health? are you suffering from any bodily disease?" He scouted the insinuation, but we need not despise the lesson suggested by these words. For it is a truth very important to all who are labouring to gain Heaven, that the body and soul are so intimately united by our Creator that one cannot suffer without the other, and the good estate of one is the prosperity of the other. And this is a wise ordinance of God's providence, brethren. For as infants would often perish if they could not by their cries make known their discomforts, so would the body perish if, through some intimate communication, the soul were not most keenly alive at all times to its requirements. It is to be eternal, this close and intimate union of soul and body. Here then, on earth, they

ought to be faithful one to another, the soul protecting the body, the body subserving the true interests of the soul. Four truths, then, brethren, seem to me worthy of remembrance respecting the connection between our souls and bodies.

The first is that holiness does not exempt us from bodily ailments. Christ did not come to take away death or sickness, but only to take away that which is the sting of death and sickness, and to sanctify both. Men of this world are sometimes shocked and scandalised when they see the body of a just man mangled by disease, that prepares the way for death. But there is no reason why the sufferings of the holy should at all surprise us. For even suppose we grant that they are by their pains atoning for their own faults—which need not be, as they may be like their Master, expiating the sins of their brethren—but even if they are enduring these pains on account of their own sins, the reflection to be made as we look on is that one which our Lord suggested to the women of Jerusalem: “Weep for yourselves. If in the green wood such things be done, what shall be done in the dry?”* The sufferings we see endured by God’s faithful servants, whether from their poverty, or their sicknesses, or from the oppression of persecutors, ought to awaken us to some sense of those sufferings which are to come on sinners who have their heaven now but none hereafter. How little we think, brethren, of all the harm which the body does during the course of a long life, and of the amount of chastisement which is in consequence stored up

* St. Luke xxiii. 28, 31.

for us, unless we make an effort to liquidate our debts while we have time in this world! The just man, then, does not suffer too much, but it may easily be that we suffer far too little.

The second truth that we may store up is this—that the state of the body will oftentimes necessarily so depress the soul that, unless we are properly instructed, we shall easily believe that sickness of body is wickedness of soul. I have already in these instructions alluded to the cry of our Divine Master from His death-bed—"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"* How often has the Minister of God, as he watches the death of the just, to remind them—when weariness of body or the diseased state of some organ brings on a feeling of wretchedness—that this suffering state is not sin, is not loss of grace, is not separation from their God, but rather a close union with Him, a privilege to drink out of the bitter cup from which He drank so largely.

The third truth which we may treasure up is a double conclusion from what has preceded. For, on the one hand, we must not expect too much demonstration of piety from the sick and the dying, nor be dismayed if we do not find them eager for long prayer. For they are undergoing the sorrows of death, and we may truly say, with the wise author of the *Imitation*, "It is a great thing if they can bear them in silence." On the other hand, when our own turn comes, we have no reason to lose hope because we, too, experience the truth of the words—"The corruptible body weighs down the soul." If we can

* St. Matt. xxvii. 46.

no longer pray even with that poor degree of recollection which we could command yesterday and the day before, we are not therefore more wicked, more displeasing to our Father in Heaven, than we were then. We have more weight to carry to-day, and therefore a slow step betokens as much goodwill as a rapid pace did when we were not laden. An ejaculation now costs us as much as a long prayer in health. I know, brethren, that by special privilege God does sometimes give to His servants a wonderful power over sickness. I know that He has promised in His Psalm to turn the bed of the sick man who has had compassion in the day of his strength for the poor and the needy. Happy they who lay in an abundant store of grace for the hour of sickness! For it is a time of most severe trial; and even if we have strength given us to endure in humble resignation, and to unite our pains with the Agony of our Divine Lord, this act of faith and hope and charity is no small grace, it is a rich recompense for past fidelity and a great triumph over death.

The last of the four truths that I ask you to store up on this subject is another conclusion from what I have said. If, then, the body has so wonderful an effect upon our souls it is quite evident that, as far as it depends upon us, we ought to try to keep our bodies in that state in which they prove most fitting instruments for the soul. The man who by excess and want of temperance in diet clogs the action of his soul, by his own free choice anticipates the work of death and disease. On the other hand, if, by temperance in diet, or by the use of some bodily

penance, we can secure free action and gladness to the soul, we are very unwise if we forfeit a great blessing rather than pay the small price required. Our Blessed Saviour tells us in His Gospel that there are devils which cannot be dislodged without the use of prayer and fasting; and the masters of spiritual life bid us not forget this word in the hour of our desolation, for, as I have said, we are then, in a limited sense, under the influence of Satan, and nothing scares him away so quickly as penance joined to prayer.

And now, before bringing this instruction to a close I will make two observations. In the first place, assuming that our present life is, as the Holy Scripture teaches, a warfare, each Christian soul may be considered as a fortified city, which the enemies of God and man are attacking, and which man, with the assistance of God and His Angels, is to defend. This being so, the wicked spirits, as we might expect, go round about us as St. Peter warns, studying us in order to plan their attack. They watch every part of our being—the intellect, the will, the memory, the body—to find the vulnerable part. If we have naturally a correct judgment, they will perhaps prefer to direct their attack against the will, which may be wanting in vigour. They also observe the habits we have formed, either good ones implanted by education, or bad ones that have grown strong by years of neglect. They well know whether we are lazy or painstaking, honest or deceitful, cowardly or courageous, boastful or shy and timid, communicative or reserved, sanguine or desponding. And knowing as they do how much

the state of the body influences the soul, they notice carefully the state of our health, in order to take advantage, if they be permitted, of every favourable chance. It was not without a reason that the Evangelist was inspired to record that it was when our Lord was hungry after a long fast that the tempter came to Him—it was to teach us a truth concerning ourselves. And we need not be excessively alarmed when we hear of this malicious vigilance on the part of the wicked spirits, because we know that if they are to attack us, God has, on the other hand, given His Angels a charge over us, and they watch to save us more anxiously than our enemies watch to ruin us. As, however, the defence of the beleaguered citadel is committed to us, we, too, ought to consider most carefully the different parts of our soul, the state of our will, memory, and understanding, and our bodily temperament also, and our acquired habits, and our virtues, and our vices, in order to know our weak points and our strong points, and how best we may protect ourselves. We are told that the proper study of mankind is man; and assuredly, if it is not each one's business to know all that ought to be known about himself, we cannot see how any one else will be likely to devote the necessary pains to this study. It may cost us a little trouble to gain this complete knowledge of ourselves, but much trouble will be spared if we do acquire it, and manage our souls and bodies with some skill. As an instance of the value of good management, our spiritual masters advise us before going to prayer to let mind and body rest for a little while. The wisdom of this rule is evident

from what I have just now said, that Satan chose the moment when our Lord was weak and tired, for his temptations. By going to prayer, we, as it were, challenge the spirits of evil; for they watch our movements, and dread prayer exceedingly. If, then, we begin our prayer jaded and weary we challenge them to attack us at a moment when we are specially unfit to repel with vigour any suggestions which they may whisper into our souls; and by prayers ill made we perpetuate and multiply troubles heavy indeed compared with the little trouble that would have been necessary to compose ourselves for prayer.

My second observation, with which I close this instruction, is this—that if, from what I have said, it appears that the business of salvation, like every other business of this world, requires study and painstaking on our part, it will be equally clear that any one anxious about his eternity ought gladly to listen to the teaching of Holy Church and her appointed Ministers. I know that we often hear it said that, after all, an error is no more than an error; that so long as the will is good and the heart true, it matters not much whether dogmas be exactly correct or not. But, brethren, we never find the Apostles or the Saints of Jesus Christ speaking such language. They too well knew how much mischief errors in the intellect can do, ever to make light of them. Why did St. Paul enjoin —“A man that is a heretic avoid.”* Why does the Apostle of love forbid us to show common courtesy to a man who comes to

* Titus iii. 10.

our house bringing false doctrine? Clearly, for three reasons. First, because God is truth, and because respect for God necessarily creates respect for His truth. Secondly, because all differences of doctrine help the work of Satan by creating divisions and discord of hearts. Thirdly, because the practice of each individual man, his hope and his love, must depend very much on his catechism of doctrine. Hence we marvel sometimes at the amazing temerity of some Anglican clergymen, who, without preparing themselves by a recourse to the traditional teaching of the Church, and without even being duly sent or commissioned, offer themselves unhesitatingly as guides through all the intricacies and perils of spiritual life. Why, brethren, even within the precincts of the Church, where there is maintained so jealous a vigilance over doctrine, how much poison might at times be poured out from the pulpit, mixed up with God's word, before authority interferes; how many errors might be instilled into the minds of a large congregation, that would render hope and love almost an impossibility, before attention was called to the pernicious teaching! I know that it is written that "the lips of the Priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth because he is the angel of the Lord of Hosts;"* but I know also that in the Catholic Church we never wholly deliver ourselves up to the Gospel of any individual Priest, as we sometimes see a small flock outside the Church following blindfold the voice of a favourite minister. We never build our faith on any one man, except

* Mal. ii. 7.

on him to whom Christ said, "Thou art the rock." As a specimen of pulpit teaching calculated to do mischief by destroying hope and charity, to which Catholic congregations might be subjected even in the midst of the safeguards which the providence of God has multiplied in the Church, I will cite two passages from the printed sermons of one long since dead, to whose voice men listened in breathless attention, and to whose words the mitre on his head gave a peculiar weight. I speak of Massillon, the celebrated Bishop of Clermont.

Preaching, then, in presence of a large mixed congregation in a Catholic city, after disclaiming all mere attempts to terrify, he exclaims, "My brethren, our ruin is almost certain, and we think not of it," and then he puts before them with great oratorical power this argument—If we here present were assured that one among us was to be lost at the judgment, which of us would not be alarmed and say, "Lord, is it I?" whereas the truth may be that "perhaps not more than one among us may be saved." Of this passage, which has been again and again reprinted in many languages as a specimen of sacred eloquence, one of the most enlightened spiritual guides of the French Church, who formed for the ministry a large body of holy Priests, said in presence of the young Clergy whom he was training at S. Sulpice, "Neither Bourdaloue nor any good theologian would ever have preached that sermon.* And in fact, brethren, if it were at all likely that only one out of a large Catholic

* M. Olier, the founder of S. Sulpice.

congregation would be saved, of what use would it be to bid you make acts of hope, or of what use to give remedies against desolation of spirit? What could life be but one dreary desolation, and an effort to drown thought by dissipation?

In like manner, preaching on another occasion with the same vehement energy on the enormity of an unworthy Communion, he uses a long series of most painful images to impress upon his audience that "after such a Communion our sentence of condemnation becomes so blended with our substance that there is no longer, so to speak, any means by which the curse which is become part of our being can be separated from us. The soul guilty of this crime"—I quote his exact words—"will perhaps be able to make some efforts to raise herself again; but these repentances will lead to nothing, she will fall again. She will perhaps leave the world, and make choice of a life of retirement; but the want of vocation will betray her into endless profanation, which she will not even perceive. There is scarcely such a thing as repentance for an unworthy Communion." Of this passage, also, I venture to say that the saintly founder of S. Sulpice would repeat his commentary—"Neither Bourdaloue nor any good theologian would preach it." And these are only two samples. Now, brethren, these sermons were heard by many—and being now perpetuated in print, they are read by the old and by the young—and by many confiding and docile minds are accepted as the true law of God coming from the mouth of the Priest. Who then will read these sermons and

say that dogma is of little importance? For how is hope to live under the blighting effects of such teaching? And if hope dies, what becomes of love? And if we have no love for God, what is to occupy our hearts? We are dragged down perforce to the husks of swine.

We are, then, in the greatest need of correct teaching. Praise, therefore, to our Lord, Who built His Church upon a rock, and Who has given us the grace to keep our eyes fixed on His Vicar, to whom He said, "I give thee the keys. I have prayed that thy faith fail not. Feed My sheep; feed My lambs."

LECTURE V.

OUR LORD'S PRESCRIPTION—"ASK, SEEK, KNOCK."

WE are studying, as you will remember, brethren, the spiritual malady of one who, on hearing mention of the Angelus Bell, and the glad tidings it preaches from the housetops, answers, with a heavy heart: "What manner of joy can it bring to me, who am estranged from God's love and mercy, unable to pray, deprived of all gladness and consolation, dead to all emotion, indifferent to all sacraments?"

We have already considered some of the prescriptions recommended by spiritual advisers for this disease of the soul. In this last instruction I will draw your attention to the remedies that still remain unnoticed. In reply, then, to his sad lament over his long and fruitless search after peace of mind, one of the physicians whom he consults is supposed to say to him: "Your statement must be exaggerated and incorrect, since you contradict our Lord by making out that you are left without a remedy, in spite of all your endeavours to find one. For if this were true our Saviour's word would be falsified; since He said solemnly: 'Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.'"^{*} Well, brethren, in the fancied case before us.

^{*} St. Matt. vii. 7.

this text produced no better effect than others had done. The weary victim of desolation, like the young man in the Gospel, replied : "All these things I have done from my youth ;" and like the young man in the Gospel, "he went away sad," not on account of his great possessions, but on account of his extreme spiritual destitution ; full now of the melancholy persuasion that he has nothing to expect but trite sayings and texts that do not reach his case. It never is wise, brethren, to turn our backs thus abruptly on any word which comes from our Blessed Lord. And this word in particular—"Ask and it shall be given you ; seek and you shall find ; knock and it shall be opened to you"—ought not to be cast aside as valueless. For it is our charter ; it is a compact of inestimable advantage to us ; a new covenant altogether in our favour, which makes over Heaven to us, since it puts our salvation into our own hands. Our Blessed Lord has bound Himself to yield to our wishes, and in other parts of the Gospel He has taken great pains to convince us that He means fully all that this promise contains, and that if we ask Him for bread He never will put us off with a stone. Let us, then, learn the value of this covenant. It contains three clauses ; we will briefly glance at each.

I. First, then, our Blessed Lord says : "Ask and it shall be given you." Naturally, therefore, the spiritual guide to whom the desolate soul disclosed its necessities at once recommended prayer as a remedy ; and as the mercy of God, which gave to the manna many different tastes, also provides us with variety in prayer in order that so necessary a duty may

not cease to be palatable, some one of the many different forms of prayer approved by Holy Church were suggested. Prayer to our Lady was mentioned, and prayer to St. Joseph, and devotion to the Sacred Heart of our Lord ; "Ask, in fine, in whatever form suits you best, provided always that you do ask ; for if you do ask you shall receive." But the poor sufferer turns away quite uncomforted. This promise, he says, cannot be for him, since to his mind, in its present state, three things seem quite evident ; the first, that he cannot pray if he would ; the second, that if he could pray he would not—prayer is become so utterly distasteful ; the third, that if he could pray and did pray, his prayer would not be listened to, since God is clearly angry with his soul. What truth is there, brethren, in these views of the desolate soul ?

All those who have known by experience what desolation of soul is, will, I think, testify that at first they were inclined to believe that to make prayer in such a state could only be an impossibility or a mockery. But in this instance, as in many others, docility soon clears away apparent impossibilities. The Apostles might have urged very strong reasons against casting in their net when bidden to do so by our Lord. They had laboured all night, and would apparently have been justified in refusing to repeat a laborious experiment which had failed so often. Happily for them, however, their spokesman answered with docility, "At Thy word I will let down the net."* We must, then, in the hour of desolation, be as docile as they were. As we have often, when in the

* St. Luke v. 5.

presence of the Blessed Sacrament, to reject boldly the suggestions of our senses, and adhere with a very staunch docility to the teaching of our faith, so must we, in time of desolation, be deaf to our feelings and listen to our guides. We shall do this more easily if now, before the hour of need arrives, we fix in our minds three truths.

I. The first, that prayer is not at all impossible in the state of desolation ; that the grace of prayer is by no means withdrawn from us ; that as grace was not withdrawn from our Saviour during His Agony on the Cross, but only those delightful feelings which sometimes accompany its presence, so now, in the hour of our desolation, grace remains with us, though the luxuries that often are given along with it are withdrawn. In solemn Masses, brethren, the Gospel is sung for us—sometimes with, sometimes without attendant lights or fragrant incense, and it is still always the true Gospel of Christ. Even so does our God sometimes give us His strengthening grace, with a very pleasant accompaniment of light and incense, and sometimes grace can come to us as Princes occasionally come, *incognito*, without the ordinary outward signs of its presence.

It is quite true that, in the hour of desolation, the spirits of darkness are allowed to draw nigh to us, as they were near to our Saviour in the time of His Passion, and they attempt to deter us from prayer by using that power which they have, by God's permission, of presenting phantoms to the mind. But their power is severely restricted by our Creator ; they can only whisper sophistries to us. As St. Augustine

worded it, they can bark, but cannot bite any one who does not choose to be bitten. And, moreover, this is certain, that even their very limited power is only given to Satan and his followers for a short time, and therefore we can always reckon on the fulfilment of that promise of which I have already spoken: "Resist the devil and he will fly from you."*

2. The second truth to be remembered is this—that prayer made in the time of desolation, so far from being a mockery, is prayer made under very great difficulties, and therefore by far more valuable and acceptable to God than prayer made when our souls were in full sunshine. The incense of prayer is an alms which we are permitted to give to our Creator. When, therefore, your soul was abounding in consolation, you were wealthy, and the prayers you poured out cost you little; you gave your alms out of your abundance; but now, in desolation, you are brought down to great poverty, you are the widow who stints herself and labours hard to be able to offer even her one mite. It is far harder now to pray for a few minutes than to pray for many hours when all was peaceful and bright. This, then, is not an hour accursed, but, on the contrary, an acceptable time. It is the time to sow in tears, for you certainly will reap in gladness, "good measure, heaped up, pressed down, and flowing over." For he who perseveres in prayer, in spite of desolation and disgust, gives as great pleasure to our Lord as St. Peter did when others fell away, and he, to the question put to him—

* St. James iv. 7.

"Will you also go away?" answered loyally—"Lord, to whom shall we go?"* Such men are the friends of Christ Jesus who persevere with Him in His hour of trial.

3. A third truth to be remembered in "the time of clouds," when we feel inclined to abandon prayer, because our prayer seems to remain unanswered, is that, most commonly, we cannot expect to be made aware at present of the effect of our prayers, and this for more reasons than one. For, in the first place, one very ordinary and very precious answer to prayer is protection from evils that would have come had we not prayed. There is a very important lesson taught us by the word our Saviour spoke at the Last Supper to St. Peter—"Satan has desired to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for thee."† Had not our Saviour spoken this word, the Apostles would never have known that the wicked spirits of hell were gathered round them unseen, plotting their ruin, and that their malice was defeated by the prayer of our Lord. Well, brethren, neither are we conscious of the thousand and ten thousand snares which would be laid for our souls by the spirits of evil were it not that prayer baffles their murderous designs. How can we know, till we see in eternity a complete and accurate photograph of all the details of our life on earth, all the dangers we and our friends have escaped in consequence of the prayers we offered up each day? You assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the early morning, or at the sound of the Angelus Bell you kneel to do honour to the Incar-

* St. John vi. 68, 69.

† St. Luke xxii. 31, 32.

nation, or you persevere in prayer in an hour of dryness and mental suffering, and in consequence you escape some most dangerous temptation that would have overcome you, or possibly win for your son or daughter a merciful warning which prevents them from consummating some sin that might have filled up the measure of their crimes. When a faithful picture of all such graces given to us is set before us after death, and when we see most clearly that God was eminently faithful, and never allowed one prayer, one sigh of our souls to go unrewarded—as he does not allow one drop of water given for His sake to remain without its recompense—then we shall see what inestimable treasures we have lost because we were cheated away from prayer by this suspicion that our prayers were not answered, and we shall cry sorrowfully—“We fools, we fools!”

Again, brethren, it is impossible that we should always see a present answer to our prayer, because we are immortal and eternal; we are destined to live with our Creator for ever, and it is in the long eternity that the chief answer to our prayer must come. How little, how very little return for all His prayers, for all His tears, for His toil, and for His Blood, did our Blessed Saviour receive while He tarried on this earth! Did He repine at this? No, for He knew the promise made to Him that He was to see a long-lived posterity. Eye hath not seen the glory of that company of redeemed Saints, who are to be long-lived indeed, since for ever and ever they will surround the throne of the Lamb that was slain, singing their anthem, “Benediction and honour and

glory and power be to Thee for ever."* And our Blessed Lord, who had eternity spread out before Him, was so far from wishing to have a recompense that could be compressed into the present short space of a life on earth, that often He repeated that it was a woe and a calamity for an immortal man if he had received his reward in this fleeting hour. This is sowing time, brethren; in eternity we reap the harvest. Let us not then permit the father of lies to play off once more on us the ruinous cheat that robbed our first parents of their happiness. For he persuaded them that their Creator was no true friend; and gladly would he persuade us now that our Father in Heaven will not hear us when we cry, nor give us good things when we ask.

II. And now we may pass on to the second clause in this charter of mercy granted to us—"Seek and ye shall find." I have said in a former instruction that God, when He selects water as the instrument of grace in baptism, takes care that water shall be plentiful, in order that salvation may not be made impossible or difficult. For the same reason we notice, that what is of necessity for a valid confession or for the due celebration of Holy Mass, is so little, that we can easily reach to it. Acting on this same bountiful system, our Creator has selected out of many methods of instructing men which were at His command, the one most easy for us all. I know that there are those who say boastingly that to read the Bible is a Christian's birthright, and that it is every man's privilege to teach himself with the aid

* Apoc. v. 13.

of his Bible. But, my brethren, we very well know that the man who follows this plan of teaching himself ordinarily finds after a life of blundering that he has been a bad master and has had a most ill-fated scholar. Such men belong to the class denounced by St. Paul, who are always learning, but never arrive at truth.* As in the fable of old, the water seems to be ever near their lips, but they are never suffered to taste it. Knowing then that we acquire knowledge more easily and more effectually by listening to masters, our Lord in His mercy fixed this decree: "Let faith come by hearing." And what is true of faith, is also true of spiritual knowledge. A long experience proves that the solution of the soul's perplexities is gained most easily by hearing the counsels of those duly appointed to act as our spiritual guides.

It is, however, quite true that the very same cause which renders prayer so distasteful during the time of desolation, also disinclines us then to seek advice. The fact is, that for the time we are, to a limited degree, subjected to a process like to that which holy Job underwent and our Saviour also suffered. The tempter has permission for the time to try his strength against us. Due limits are of course prescribed to his malice; and Angels watch to see that he do not overstep his bounds: but within the limits enjoined he has the power to present false lights to mislead us, and spectres to terrify us, and we become to a certain degree under his personal influence. I use this word in order to make more

* 2 Tim. iii. 7.

clear the importance of taking proper counsel in the time of darkness and desolation. For we know that here on earth, when an heir or an heiress becomes spell-bound by the personal influence of another, while the enchantment lasts the poorest sophisms seem like oracles of wisdom. But if the schemes proposed by the wily seducer are made known to the father or mother of the victim, or to any person not under the spell, the proposals and arguments all appear in their proper hideous colours. For this reason, such evil-minded seducers dread exposure as fatal to their plans—according to that word, "Every one that doth evil hateth the light."* When, then, the fallen angels are permitted to make an attack upon us, they dread our speaking to an experienced man not bewitched at the moment by their spell, more than they dread holy water. They know quite well that the lie which seems so plausible to us will at once be detected and baffled by another not bewitched; consequently they are active in suggesting that to speak is useless, that we already know ourselves the answer we should receive, that our business is too trifling, that we should be laughed at, or possibly branded and dismissed as too wicked and incurable. Let us then store up this truth, brethren—that faith and counsel come by hearing; and resolve in our time of darkness to "seek that we may find."

III. And now we come to the third and last clause of this covenant made with His loved children by our Father in Heaven—"Knock and it shall be

* St. John iii. 20.

opened to you." We are sometimes in our moments of depression inclined to ask, If God love us, and is good, why does He compel us to knock? why does He not open Heaven at once, and let us in? Or why not give us in abundance the good things of this world now, and then welcome us to the bliss of Heaven without condemning us to so much trial?

In answer I say, brethren, that God, like every other good father, must wish to have His children like to Himself. Now, one of God's attributes is strength and power; He cannot then ever consent to leave us in a degraded state of cowardly helplessness. He has given us a free will that brings us near to Himself; He never can then consent to our sinking down to the level of dumb animals. For the birds of the air He will provide, though they neither spin nor weave; but man—the image of God—must to a certain degree create for himself by what the Scripture calls "the counsel of his hands."* And even when chastising us after our fall, our Creator chose a system of correction that would ennoble us and raise us higher than primeval innocence had done. The new created world which sets before us the second Adam "in labour from His youth," and carrying His own Cross to the scene of His Death, offers to the Martyr, and the Confessor, and the Virgin—in fact, to those in every condition of life—a higher destiny than was offered to man in Eden.

For our sakes, therefore, and because He loves us, and would share with us all that He can share of what is His, our God has laid this law on man:

* Prov. xxxi. 13.

"In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread ;" and therefore we must knock if we would have Heaven open to us ; "the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away." As then our Blessed Saviour warned his Apostles that the devil of sensuality could not be dislodged without prayer and fasting, so our spiritual guides very earnestly remind us that in the critical time of desolation, the spirit of sadness, of confusion, and of despair that is hovering around us, is most easily put to flight if we knock as well as ask, by adding to the cry of our heart some convenient form of penance.

When they use the phrase some convenient form of penance, they imply, that according to their different temperaments and constitution, and the state of their health and other circumstances, different persons require a different treatment, and that the penance that would be useful to one might harm another. Without, however, staying to enumerate here different modes of doing penance, I wish to end these instructions by calling attention to one manner of knocking at Heaven's gates which is convenient for us all—I speak of humiliation.

We are in search of peace. The anguished soul of which we are treating is enduring a protracted and uncheered martyrdom that seems to lead to no crown ; ordinary prayer seems to avail nothing ; other remedies prescribed work no cure. Then in God's name let us try at last the remedy specially commended in Holy Writ for the hour of desolation. You are, as Ecclesiasticus words it, "in the time of clouds."*

* Ecclus. ii. 2.

Well, then, the Holy Ghost assures us by the mouth of this same Ecclesiasticus, that "the prayer of him who humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds."* Here is precisely the remedy we are seeking for. A dark cloud is enveloping the desolate soul; we want a form of prayer that will pierce it, and we have our answer—that the prayer of him who humbles himself shall pierce that cloud. This then is the last remedy that I have to propose to those whose souls are habitually in desolation and darkness. Even if all other remedies fail, this one may bring peace. If we cannot lay the blame of our spiritual condition on weak health; if we cannot bring ourselves to believe that we are gold or silver being tried in the fire; if we cannot realise that the love of God is strong within us, though possibly latent; if prayer and counsel seem to avail little; if the state of misery has endured far too long a time to be called a passing cloud; even so, from this promise we may still draw hope—"The prayer of him who humbles himself shall pierce the clouds." Nay, it may be true that in our case some unforgiven sins are the cause of our estrangement from our Creator; but even in this case, if we can only humble our hearts, we have a right to present ourselves before our Lord and say, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation;" for by His own dictation it is written, "The contrite and humbled heart Thou wilt not despise."†

And this, brethren, is the sovereign remedy which, as I said in the first of these instructions, is suggested

* Eccclus. xxxv. 21.

† Psalm l. 14, 19.

by the Angelus Bell which preaches on the housetops the mystery of the Incarnation. For when in wonder we ask the question, What is man that Thou dost visit Him? what induced the Word to become Flesh? our Blessed Lady whispers the answer in secret, and the Angelus Bell preaches it from the housetops—"He looked down on the lowliness of His handmaid." Lowliness, or humility, has a charm that attracts the eye and the heart of our Lord. As the Psalmist tells us, "He dwelleth on high, but looketh down on the low things in Heaven and on earth."* Now, brethren, if this be so, if our Creator is really only looking for things lowly, only deferring His mercy till we are low enough, it must be our own fault if mercy do not come. I have already said that it must be ordinarily our own fault if children die without baptism, as water is abundant. Still more then must it be our own fault if the graces we need do not come to us, since humiliation draws down mercy, and humiliation is within us and all round about us more plentiful than water. What are our bodies but a mass of humiliation, and what is our soul but a sickly and diseased and ulcerated creature, a very unsightly corruption, the secrets of which we do our best to hide, and like no one to know? Humiliation assuredly ought not to be difficult. If my Creator would not look on me till I am wise, or rich, or learned, or refined, I might complain; but if He is only waiting till I sit down in my proper place; if because He knows quite well "that man born of woman is full of miseries," all

* Psalm cxii. 5.

that He detests is a proud lie that denies these miseries, and all He desires is the truth—that man should acknowledge his sores; if there be any truth at all in that inspired word of the Psalm, that as soon as our God and our Father sees a man seated low enough—in his proper position upon the dung-hill—He quickly lifts him up and sets him among the princes, then has He not a right to say *My burden is light*? Is there not perfect truth in His challenge, “Come ye and buy wine and milk without money!”* For who is there that cannot go down to a low place? To climb is difficult—to outstrip rivals and gain a high place is a most laborious task; but when we go down to low places there is no rivalry to obstruct us, nobody cries out, there is no jealousy. When the man in the Gospel says, “I cannot dig, and to beg I am ashamed,” we can believe him; but when a man born of woman and filled with many miseries, can have mercy and blessings if he will but take his proper place, and forbear from disguising all his miseries, we cannot believe him if he says he has done his best, and still has not found mercy. And to one oppressed in the time of desolation with an overpowering sense of his wretchedness, humiliation must be specially congenial. It is, to use a word become familiar among us, a homœopathic medicine for the disease of desolation that I am now prescribing. The enemy of God and man is trying to cast me down into despair by whispering to me how wicked I am, and how cold and lifeless for all good, how full of inclination for all

* *Isaias* *lv.* 1.

evil ; and my good Angel cures me with kindred thoughts properly applied and moderated. He, too, depresses me ; he, too, leads me downward, but not into despair, but to my proper place—to truth and humility. And when my heart is humbled, my Creator can no longer despise—He must lift me up and set me once more among His princes, among the children of His home.

The Angels, then, who know the mind of our Creator, and that He sends the chastisement of desolation in order that humiliation may prepare the way for mercy, say to us when the hour of trouble comes : "Be ye humbled under the mighty hand of God."* Humble yourselves, and your Creator need not humble you, but can exert all His might to do great things for you, and exalt you as He exalted His humble handmaid Holy Mary. If, then, desolation and darkness and a sense of estrangement prevail, let us not say it is a mystery, and unaccountable and very dispiriting. Let the conclusion be that we have not sat down in a place low enough for us. Is this a forced and strained and improbable conclusion, brethren ? How many strong arguments could be brought to prove that habitually, in church and out of church, in our homes and in public places, in our dealings with the great above us, or with servants and tradesmen and the poor beneath us, and most of all in our dealing with our Creator and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, we are too high, too proud, quite in a false position ; and therefore it is no wonder that our God, who must resist and scatter pride, sometimes turns away his face from

* 1 St. Peter v. 6.

us and leaves us desolate. Let us, for brevity's sake, confine ourselves to one part of the calculation that we ought to make in order to ascertain whether we practise sufficiently humiliation. Immediately after death we shall have to undergo humiliation and chastisement for all sins that have not been sufficiently expiated, and till the last farthing of our debt is paid we shall not be released from the prison. Our term of imprisonment and the severity of our treatment, then, will be measured most accurately by the number and heinousness of our sins and the smaller or larger amount of our deeds of expiation here. Now, brethren, how much do you imagine of humiliation and suffering will be allotted to you in the next life on account of sins committed and unexpiated? This reckoning would help to determine what our exercise of humiliation ought to be here. And I wish to assume that, through our God's infinite goodness, we die free from the guilt of mortal sin, and therefore have only to clear away a limited debt of temporal punishment incurred during our lifetime here.

How long, then, will our purgation last? Refresh your memory, and set before your mind certain words of our Lord on this subject—"The servant who knew the will of his Lord and prepared not himself, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes."* In these words attention is drawn, in the first place, to the clear and full knowledge that we have of our duty,

* St. Luke xii. 47, 48.

which will increase the number of our stripes, and also to two kinds of sin which we deal with very leniently. First, the sins we commit in what we call ignorance; and, secondly, the sins which seem to come from surprise or infirmity, but, in reality, are multiplied from our neglect of preparation. The soul that pleads ignorance is often not in total darkness but in a kind of twilight. There is some knowledge, some misgiving of conscience when the evil is done, and therefore the unerring justice of our Judge must pass sentence, and stripes must be inflicted. Again, there are sins of temper, which we commit under provocation, and distractions at prayer, and aversions, and a multitude of other sins which, under the circumstances, seem irresistible; with these we are indulgent. The Gospel, however, points out carefully wherein we are guilty in these cases; we ought to have prepared ourselves for circumstances which we well knew would come. We are often warned that our Creator expects from us something very much beyond a careless observance of His precepts; "Thou hast commanded Thy commandments to be kept most diligently," the Psalmist says.* Alas! brethren, where is this diligence? If then deliberate, grievous sins—forgiven, but not fully expiated—are to be purged away after death, and with them the deliberate venial sins of thought, of word, of deed, and in addition to these those thoughts we pass over more easily—our negligences and our ignorances, as we call them—when shall the last farthing of our debt be paid? We wonder at the persevering fidelity with which some

* Psalm cxviii. 4.

pious families in the Church remember each year their departed relatives, and beg for prayers, and take care to have the Holy Sacrifice offered. Are they doing too much or we too little to cancel the effects of sin? We know nothing. We can only say, with the Prophet of old—"O Lord, Thou knowest!"* Still, we must not overlook the facts that are before us. First, it is quite clear to any one who thinks, that a man can multiply and does multiply his sins with amazing rapidity. I speak of those sins that we consider not deadly, but more pardonable offences. The tongue, according to St. James, is "a world of iniquity;" which is as much as to say that we can with our tongues alone during our lifetime heap up a debt of chastisement somewhat like a vast world, and our thoughts can work much faster than our tongues. And if with our hands we write our words and spread them; and if, by our looks and our dress and our example and our style, we scandalise, and thus multiply sins in others, who will say how many anniversary Masses we may need? And besides these smaller sins, there may be very heinous sins of theft, of slander, of adultery, of hatred, of sacrilege, forgiven indeed by absolution, but with a long commutation, imposed by God's justice in place of eternal torment, which has never been liquidated. How much humiliation, how much chastisement, will these entail before the last farthing is paid and the prison door opened to us?

We know, moreover, what sentences we ourselves pass on culprits when they are detected here on earth.

* Ezech. xxxvii. 3.

For insubordination the soldier has heavy lashes ; are they just ? If so, how comes it that our insubordination escapes ? or, rather, does it escape, or are the stripes only deferred ? We tear a dishonest man away from his home, from his wife and his child, and condemn him to years of penal servitude. If this be just, how do we escape ? A sin concealed is not less guilty, surely, than a sin detected. Or is it that we have not escaped, but that we are not so blessed as to have our chastisement here ?

Again, it would be useful, if time allowed, to dwell on the evils produced by certain sins, in order to form a truer estimate of the chastisement which awaits them. Let us but look at one sample. Ecclesiasticus thus describes the bad consequences that follow from a breach of secrecy :—"He that discloseth the secret of a friend loseth his credit, and shall never find a friend to his mind. If thou discover his secrets, follow no more after him. As one that letteth a bird go out of his hand, so hast thou let thy neighbour go, and thou shalt not get him again. Follow after him no more, for he is gone afar off, he is fled, as a roe escaped out of the snare : because his soul is wounded. Thou canst no more bind him up. And of a curse there is reconciliation : but to disclose the secrets of a friend, leaveth no hope to an unhappy soul."* Now, brethren, does not this seem a very serious view to take, as things go at present, of such a fault as a breach of secrecy ? In olden times, if men were then

* Ecclus. xxvii. 17—24.

more earnest and talked less than we do, we can imagine such a severe code of morality remaining in force; but in this century, and in our circumstances, when of necessity so many hours of each day must be spent in conversation, who could afford to cast off a friend merely because he has betrayed a secret? How many friends would remain to a man at the end of the season if he had to act on these ancient principles! Conversation must go on. From the uncertain moment when our day begins in the morning, not only to the close of day, but far into those still hours of the night which, according to the Psalm, the providence of our Creator arranged that man might rest and beasts might prowl about for their prey, you must talk—it is the law. Well, brethren, if so many hours must be filled up with conversation, who is to furnish us with materials for our conversation? If there are to be no idle words—nothing but what is useful to me who speak or to him who listens—we are all very soon dried up, and what are we to do? Utilities cannot be had in sufficient quantity to fill up so many hours of conversation, and, moreover, such useful topics as one can meet with are more or less insipid. Society then simply must come to an end, or you must introduce some savoury words, something to interest. And if you wish to interest, it is a choice whether you tell some little news confided to you by a friend, or blacken the reputation of an absent enemy, or paint some one of those scenes which St. Paul says are not to be named among us, but which we know are whispered about, and more than whispered about

in good society. A revelation of a secret is not then, I think, with us one of the most heinous crimes. And if ancient severity reappears in the next world, if every indiscreet betrayal of trust is visited with a heavy condemnation, how will it fare with our violation of more weighty points of the law? I do not, then, brethren, consider it a wonder or unnatural that desolation of soul should at times prevail. There is cause enough for it.

And now I conclude, with one observation. It has occurred to me more than once while dwelling thus on our mental sufferings, that I may possibly be speaking in presence of some who are strangers to the Church and may be shocked at hearing of so much infirmity within her borders. I would, then, that there were no worse signs of human weakness in the Church than those I have been describing; and at the same time I add, "What God has joined let no man sunder." For when the Most Sacred Trinity joined together in one the divinity of God and our human nature, then also was determined the character of the Bride of Christ, the Church—that its whole existence on earth is to be made up of God's grace and man's infirmity. Holy Church need not then, as the woman of this world does, paint herself and gild herself to disguise infirmities. No, brethren; for our Lord came specially to conquer the pride of Lucifer, and to bring in among us humility. And it is no part of His plan to take away infirmity; for if, with the rottenness of the grave before us, and carrying about with us day

and night so much of disease, so much of corruption, we still are proud, what would become of us if virtue were not perfected by infirmity?

If, then, we hope to escape from excessive desolation, let the Angelus Bell remind us to love what our Lord loved, the humility of His handmaid and His Mother, Holy Mary.

SERMONS ON THE
MYSTERIES OF THE HOLY INFANCY.
BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

SUMMARY.

ON THE INCARNATION.

Verbum Caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis.

The Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us.

(St. John i. 14.)

GOD'S plan for our redemption. His knowledge of all the consequences of the Fall, and determination to redress them by the Incarnation.

Who is the Word? Explanation by analogy. The Second Person of the Ever Blessed Trinity became Man for our sakes. All our hopes are in the Incarnation.

Why God chose this particular way for our redemption. The answer contained in the practical lessons taught us by the Incarnation.

1. *Love.* Different degrees of love. Our Lord shows His the utmost degree. 2. *Humility.* God's display of love is meant to lead us to great confidence in Him. The humility of the Incarnation is meant to teach us humility. What humility is. How we are to know whether we possess it. Do we submit ourselves so far to God as to avoid even all venial deliberate sin? Do we submit ourselves so much as to avoid all mortal sin? Our great source of confidence is Jesus Christ.

SERMON I.

THE INCARNATION A LESSON OF LOVE AND HUMILITY.

Verbum Caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis.

The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us.

(Words taken from the 14th verse of the 1st chapter of St. John's Gospel.)

THESE few simple words, my dear brethren, put before us that great mystery of the Gospel which lies at the root of all the other mysteries connected with the work of our redemption. Short as they are, they are sufficient to make known to us the plan and method by which God from eternity determined to save and restore mankind, and raise man to even a higher state than that from which he had fallen. For man had fallen in our first father, Adam, and God, the Almighty Creator of man and of all things, looked down from His high and holy place in Heaven, and saw all the evil things which had followed from his fall. He took in, with one glance of His all-seeing Eye, all the misery which has ever existed and ever will exist in this world of ours, so full of miseries, and His Heart was filled with sorrow and compassion for the creatures whom He had made. He saw all that long series of wicked and unjust deeds, the oppressions of the innocent and

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helpless, the apparent triumphs of the tyrant and oppressor, the ruthless acts, the unholy contentions, the bloody wars of which history tells us. Nay, more, His eye rested upon those secret kinds of shame from the view of which we should shrink with horror, and the very mention of which gives us pain—the sudden stroke of the dastardly murderer, the hidden steps of the prowling thief, the stealthy action of the unjust dealer, who robs the poor in his daily trade, the miserable drunkard, who reels along a spectacle of contempt to men and Angels, the hidden foulness of the slave of lust, who defiles his manhood and degrades himself below the level of the brutes. All this God saw, and though moved to wrath was yet more moved to pity. His ears, too, were open to the loud cry of woe which was ever rising up from this wretched earth. He heard the sounds of mourning and lamentation, the anguished shrieks of those who suffered wrong, the moanings of injured and bereaved ones with which the world was filled ; He heard the high loud words of pride and ignorance by which He was Himself defied, the hideous blasphemies, the foul curses, the filthy words and conversations by which men pollute themselves and kill the souls of others ; He heard the noise of unmeaning or drunken revelry in the streets, the vile songs which proceed from the low concert-room, or place of secret meeting. All this He heard, and again, though moved to wrath, He was still more moved to tenderness and pity. For besides all this He saw men, in consequence of all these miseries and sins, falling down into hell day by day, hour by

hour, minute by minute, thick as the leaves of autumn. And He heard their long despairing shrieks of agony when they found out what the case really was—that they had taken the wrong course, that while following their own bad ways they had forgotten they had been fighting against God, and so were now lost for ever, lost without a chance of ever recovering themselves again. This it was that moved our great Father in Heaven to pity and compassion, and for this it was that “the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us,” that man might have the means of escaping from all these evils, might be saved and restored, and learn the way to Heaven and God’s own presence, then once more opened to him.

Now it is this means by which God has chosen to deliver mankind from the slavery of sin, and from its terrible consequences, that I want you especially to consider this morning. And in the first place, what are we precisely to understand by these few words—“The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us”? Who and what is the Word? Well, we all know that in God there are three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Now by the Word is signified the second of these Divine Persons. The Word is God the Son. The Second Person is called the Word to explain to us to some extent the wonderful manner in which the Eternal Son of God is begotten in the bosom of His Father. It explains it in this way. If you examine the workings of your own mind, you will find that when you hear or read something new, you are at first able to lay hold of it

only in a confused sort of way, without grasping the whole of it, but when your mind has had a little time to work upon the idea presented to it, it gradually gets a clear understanding of it, and this clear understanding or notion of the thing gains, as it were, an existence of its own in the mind which forms it, and you will be able to give it an outward clothing in a word or words by which you may impart it to your fellow-men. Thus, there is an inner word formed first in the mind, which the outer word of speech or language expresses. Now, something like this must have taken place from all eternity in the mind of God, for from eternity, He has understood Himself and all things possible and capable of being understood, and in thus understanding Himself and all things the Divine Word was formed in the mind of the Father. And just as the inner word which our minds form of the thing we understand is an image of the thing itself, so, in the mind of God, the Word formed was necessarily the Image of Himself, as He Himself was the thing chiefly understood. And thus it comes that the Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is called by St. Paul the express Image of His Person.

Now it was this Divine Word, this Eternal Son of God, thus begotten in the bosom of the Father, and therefore Himself Very God of Very God, Who was made Flesh and dwelt among us. We know how this was done ; how He took our nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, being conceived by the Holy Ghost, without the intervention of man, how He was born into the world at Bethlehem, received

the holy name of Jesus, because He was to save His people from their sins, and was proclaimed to be the Christ, the anointed Redeemer and King, by the coming down of the Holy Ghost upon Him at His Baptism in the Jordan. Thus in Jesus Christ was the Word made Flesh, for in Him was the one Person of God the Son, though in two natures, the nature of God and the nature of Man, and this Jesus Christ dwelt among men, delivered God's message of love to them, laboured for them, comforted them, taught them, died for them, and saved them.

This, then, my dear brethren, is the fact upon which rests all our hope of peace and friendship with God and victory over sin—in a word, all our hope of a happy eternity ; the great fact that the Word was made Flesh, God became Man, and dwelt among us. This is the way in which Almighty God has chosen to save us, and besides it there is no other way of salvation given to men.

Now I want you especially and very carefully to consider the nature of this method of saving men which God has thus voluntarily and deliberately chosen in preference to all other methods. He might have chosen another way, for He had many others out of which to make a choice, but he chose this one and no other. What was there in it that made it the object of His special preference—that moved Him to such a selection ?

1. It will help us to answer this question if we consider what are the great practical lessons which the Incarnation teaches us. The first great lesson will

not be far to seek. Is it not summed up in one word—*love*, the love of God for fallen man in his misery and depravity? Yes, truly, herein is love; that Christ first loved us, and gave Himself for us and to us wholly and without reserve, in that while we were yet enemies Christ died for us. No greater example of love was ever shown, and of this we shall easily be convinced if we consider in what it is that true and genuine love consists. True love does not consist in words, but in deeds; it especially shows itself in the bestowal of benefits. But even in true love there may be different degrees. First there may be the bestowal of benefits through the hands of another, then they may be conferred by the person dispensing them with his own hand, or finally, they may be bestowed at the expense of inconvenience and labour on the part of the giver. Thus a King might dispense favours to his subjects by his ministers and servants, and such would be a sign of true regard and solicitude for his subject's welfare, but if he called the favoured person into his own presence, and by word of mouth assured him of his good intentions towards him, it needs not to be said how such an act of grace would enhance the sense of benefit, and give a yet stronger proof of the reality of the sovereign's love. But if this King proceeded yet further, and actually descended from his throne, and incurred personal effort and labour in order to bestow his gifts in his own person—and this not because it was indispensably necessary, but only that he might render the conviction of the sincerity of his love strong beyond all suspicion, here would be love indeed—love true,

real, and genuine, and that would call for all possible love and gratitude in return.

Now, my dear brethren, did not Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, accredit His love for us by all the proofs that I have enumerated, nay, by proofs infinitely greater in value, because of the infinite dignity of Him who vouchsafed them? "Christ," says an old writer, "covered the royal purple of His Divinity with the sackcloth of our humanity." Yes, it was God, and no earthly king, who came down from His throne to shower His gifts and blessings upon us. He, the mighty Master of all things, humbled Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant, that He might show His love for us in the most striking possible way, that He might, by labour and toil, win the right of being present with us in our very flesh, and of giving the great gifts which He had to bestow with His own bountiful Hand. The Incarnation, then, first of all teaches us the great lesson of God's immense love for us.

2. The second great lesson which is presented to us in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is that of humility, of humility that shrank not from the depth of all possible humiliation. The fact that the Word condescended to be made Flesh is proof enough of this; but if it were necessary, we could fall back on the whole course of that life which our Lord spent while He dwelt among us on earth, and we should at once see how it was only the carrying out of this same great lesson in all that humiliation which was commenced at the Incarnation. He stooped to be born of a poor woman, in a stable, and to be

wrapped up in humble garments, and to be laid in the manger there. He refused not to be circumcised as a sinner; to fly into Egypt, as one devoid of power to defend Himself; to be baptised among publicans and sinners, as if He were one of them Himself. When the people wished to do Him honour, and robe Him in the trappings of an earthly king, He betook Himself to flight, and hid Himself; when they sought Him, to cover Him with insults and dishonour, He freely showed Himself to them. Men praise Him, and even the devils publish His praises by the mouths of the possessed, and He commands them to keep silence; others overwhelm Him with injuries and reproaches, and He answers them never a word. After all this, as if to recommend the great virtue of humiliation to us as His last will and testament, He abased Himself before His Disciples, and with His own Hands washed their feet. Last of all, He crowns the whole by the ignominy of the Cross. "He chose," says St. Bernard,* "to annihilate Himself in order first to teach by example what He would after teach by Word: 'Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall receive rest for your souls.'"+

Now then, my dear brethren, without going further, I think we have quite sufficient ground for concluding what were the motives which led our good God to choose this way of the Incarnation of His Son as the means of saving us, and no other way. As far as we have seen, these motives were: first, to save us; secondly, to show His love for us; thirdly,

* Serm. i., *De Nativ.*

† St. Matt. xi. 29.

to teach us the great lesson of humility. To show His love: He might have saved us by His mere word spoken from afar, but He could not be satisfied without showing His love in the most perfect manner, by Himself coming down to live, and toil, and labour amongst us, and reassuring us by His own presence. He did this because He knew how necessary it was that we should have confidence in Him, and how hard it is for the sinner to rise up to confidence in the God Whom he has offended. Oh, yes! our first parents hid themselves when they had sinned—they could not bear the approach of God's presence, and this is what every sinner would do if he could, after committing a sin, especially if it be the first sin. When he begins to think of God, his first impulse is to hide himself from Him; and even when he begins to repent, his thought is, But how can I ask God to forgive me, how can I bear His presence, how can I draw near to Him to beg for pardon of my sin? And God Himself has replied to the fears of that poor fearful doubting heart, He has in very action said, I Myself will come to help you; I Myself am come to save you: "Come to Me therefore all ye that labour and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest." Oh, my dear brethren, how great is God's love for us! let us doubt all things, rather than the reality of this love. Poor weary sinner, think of this love if you are striving weakly to rise above your sins; think of this love and take courage, and come and taste how gracious this Lord and Saviour is; come, and you will find how ready and eager He is to give you pardon.

to give you peace. *Sursum corda*—have confidence in God!

But again, the Incarnation teaches us the great lesson of humility. Now what is this humility of which it is clear Almighty God makes such account?

I would reply that in general, that in principle, humility is that habitual state of mind, that habitual disposition of heart, which brings the creature into subjection to the Creator, which leads a man to submit himself perfectly to the will of God, or in other words, it is a perpetual reference of ourselves to God, our Creator and our Father. If we examine the matter, we shall find that it was in this that our Divine Lord's humility essentially consisted; that from the first moment of the Incarnation He offered Himself in sacrifice, submitted Himself to God's will without reserve,* and from thenceforth He never attributed anything to Himself, but referred all to His Father, as coming from Him. Now this habitual constant reference of all things to God, this enduring submission to His will, can only proceed from the love of God always abiding in our hearts; and thus, according to St. Austin, "Pride is the love of self up to the point of contempt of God; humility is the love of God up to the point of contempt of self."

Humility then, my dear brethren, consists in stooping, in lowering ourselves, in putting ourselves in our right place with respect to our Creator and our God. It was to teach us this that Jesus Christ stooped, lowered Himself, and put Himself in the

* Heb. x. 9.

position of a creature, of which He had taken the form upon Himself.

And from this fact we begin to see more clearly the great significance of the way in which God chose to save us—the way of humility and humiliation. One reason, no doubt, why He took this way was because it goes directly to the root and cause of man's fall and man's sins. It destroys pride. All sin springs from pride more or less, for it springs from the creature choosing itself, its own pleasures and miserable gratifications, of whatever kind, in the place of the Creator ; in a word, from the love of self and contempt of Almighty God. But Jesus Christ reversed all this, and in His Incarnation laid the solid foundation of the great simple truth, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." No means of safety but through the love of God.

Let us now come to the practical question, Have I this love of God in my heart? Am I trying to practise the great lesson of humility which my God Saviour set me in working out my salvation? A grave and solemn question this, dear brethren, upon which the eternity of each of us depends. What reply have we to make? what do our hearts say in answer to it? what sort of a response is made by our daily lives? Are we conscious of no proud or vain thoughts centering in ourselves; no haughty self-exalting words, perhaps uttered at the expense and to the disparagement of our fellow-men; no discontent at the station in which God has placed us in the world, no vain aspiring and apeing of those above us, no jealousy or uneasiness at the success of those who

seem to have done better than ourselves? True humility, true love of God, ought to and will exclude all these things if it truly exists and has possession of our souls. Do we possess it?

Now one or two considerations will help us to answer this question in a practical manner:—

1. A Christian man will assent to the proposition that to please God must be the greatest good in this world, and to displease Him in any degree a very great evil. But venial sin, next to mortal sin, is that which displeases God most in this world; therefore, if we want to enjoy the friendship of God, we shall avoid venial sin. That is, if we are living in watchfulness against the commission of the least sin, we have humility and the love of God in our hearts; we are living in submission to Him, referring all our actions to Him or His greater glory.

Or to take a somewhat lower standard, which is not so safe a one as the one just given, God is our Creator, therefore it must be just and right not to offend Him; but that which offends Him most in the world is mortal sin. Therefore I will suffer the loss of all things, even death itself, rather than grieve my God and Lord by the commission of one mortal sin. Or again, we may reason thus: nothing can be more useful to man than the friendship of God; but by mortal sin that friendship is lost. Therefore I will undergo all trials, suffer anything rather than lose God's friendship by mortal sin. Are we conscious then that we are living always on the watch, carefully guarding ourselves against mortal sin? If so, then at least we have sufficient humility in our hearts,

sufficient submission to His will to keep His commandments, and if we keep firm to that we shall save our souls. But mind, nothing short of that will do. And the best way to secure this is to adopt the first standard ; do our utmost, that is, to avoid venial, even the least, sin.

Such, my dear brethren, is the warfare before us if we would save our souls ; and perhaps poor human nature takes fright at the prospect, and cries out, Who is sufficient for these things ? Who can always be on his guard, who can always keep down temptation, who can always stand upright in a strife like this, when the world, the devil, and his own bad passions and inclinations are constantly arrayed against him ? Who is sufficient for these things ? No man is sufficient, my dear brethren ; but patience, have confidence, there is one at hand to help you—*The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us.* There is our ground for trust, there is our source of strength. He has become Man that He might teach us the great lesson of humility ; and He will Himself give us strength to follow His example, if we only seek it from Him with a sincere and true heart in our prayers to Him, and in His holy sacraments.

Oh, yes, Jesus Christ is our strength—the Word made Flesh. To use the words of St. Ambrose : “ We have all thing in Jesus Christ ; if you wish for the healing of your wounds, He is the physician ; if the fire of fever burn within you, He is the fountain of living water ; if the weight of your sins presses hard upon you, He is righteousness ; if you want help, He is power and strength ; if you want to go to Heaven,

He is the way; if you wish to escape from the darkness, He is light; if you need nourishment, He is the Bread which came down from Heaven; in short, whatever you want, whatever you desire, you will find in Him.”*

So we read in another place: “If the infernal foe assail you, take up a stone, and he will flee; and that stone is Jesus Christ. If you have recourse to Jesus Christ, the wolf will vanish, and will have no power to hurt you or make you afraid. Peter sought for this rock when he was sinking in the waves, and he found what he sought, for he laid hold of the right hand of Jesus Christ, and so obtained deliverance.”

Yes, there is grace, strength, peace, *Per Dominum Jesum Christum*—“through Jesus Christ our Lord”—as the Church ends all her prayers. Let us be true to Him, true to ourselves in the imitation of His humility and humiliation, and He will be true to us to admitting us to the sight of His glory, and making us sharers in His triumph in Heaven. Amen.

T. B. PARKINSON, S.J.

* St. Ambrose, *De Virgin*, l. iii.

S U M M A R Y.

SERMON II.

THE NATIVITY A LESSON OF LOVE AND POVERTY.

Et peperit Filium suum primogenitum, et pannis Eum involvit, et reclinavit Eum præsepio.

She brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger. (St. Luke ii. 7.)

CHRISTMAS DAY the day of our great joy. Yet, when we look at the scene at Bethlehem, it might appear as if it were rather a time for mourning. Greatness of Mary, Jesus, and Joseph. We see these, the highest and the greatest of creatures, under these circumstances of want and suffering.

But these circumstances form the ground of our rejoicing, because the mystery of Bethlehem is essentially a mystery of love. The humiliations and sufferings of our Lord are the greatest proof of His love.

The great practical lesson of the day is *poverty*. Our Lord chose this state of set purpose, that we might follow His example.

Poverty has a bad name in the world. The acquirement of riches is thought to justify everything. Poverty suggests hardship and privation ; riches bring honour and the power of enjoyment.

The scene at Bethlehem is the answer to the false maxims of the world. Jesus Christ has given us His own example as our rule of judgment.

Advantages of the state of poverty ; it is safer and higher than the contrary state, though it does not follow that all poor men will save their souls. May the Child of Bethlehem impress this truth on our minds and hearts.

SERMON II.

THE NATIVITY A LESSON OF LOVE AND POVERTY.

Et peperit Filium suum primogenitum, et pannis Eum involvit, et reclinavit Eum in præsepio.

She brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger.

(Words taken from the 7th verse of the 2nd chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.)

THIS day, my dear brethren, is a day of great joy to us all, and we have reason and a right to rejoice. The Church, by her holy Advent services, has been preparing us for this day, telling us to arise, as it were, out of sleep, and lift up our heads and shake off all torpor and despondency, for One was at hand Who would raise up those that had fallen, strengthen the feeble knees, and bring health to the sick and succour to the poor and needy ; in a word, Who would come and save us. Therefore she has been repeating to us to rejoice in the Lord always, but especially now to rejoice, for the Lord is at hand. And now to-day this Lord has come, and a great Light has shone forth from Heaven, and the Angels have told us through the shepherds to be joyful and exceeding glad, "for I bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people." To us, too, therefore, this glad message comes ; shall we not also raise up our hearts and be thankful and joyous

to-day, and rejoice with Blessed Mary in the actual coming of God our Saviour ?

And yet, my dear brethren, when we consider the way in which the ground and reason of our Christmas gladness is presented to us, it might seem at first sight hard for us to give free scope to our rejoicing. For what is that ground but the spectacle put before us in the text—"She brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger"? When we take into account the persons who are here spoken of, and the lowly condition in which they are exhibited to us, does there not seem to be ground for weeping rather than rejoicing?

Let us try to place clearly before our eyes this wonderful scene, and to realise its full significance. What is it that we see? It is a stable at Bethlehem, a village not very far from Jerusalem. This stable is a remarkable one, being, in fact, a cave hollowed out of the rock, which has been taken possession of and rudely fitted up for the housing of cattle. You may see the stalls roughly put up, and the whole place just like any other stable upon which no great care is bestowed. In a corner, furthest from the opening which serves the purpose of a door, there is a stall in which a little dry hay or straw has been shaken down; a rude lamp is suspended over it; at the foot stands a man in middle age, leaning with an air of earnest thought and deep respect upon the staff in his hands; on the straw reposes a young maiden little advanced beyond the age of girlhood; and in a poor manger at the head lies a new-born Infant,

wrapped up in poor garments, perhaps hastily procured, to protect Him from the winter cold. There is a light of deep love and devotion and adoration in the eyes of the young maiden, as she gazes upon her Child with all the first raptures of motherhood ; all sense of her own discomfort is lost in the strong emotions which that spectacle is exciting in her heart. Now who are the persons thus presented to us ? “ I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.” Yes, Jesus and Mary are before us in that stable—Jesus the new-born Babe in the manger, Mary on the rough straw scattered on the ground, and Joseph, the just man appointed to be the guardian of both, stands before them as their loving protector.

But more in detail. Mary—who was she ? The fairest of God’s creatures, “ beautiful with a beauty in soul and body that knows no stain ;” who had been preordained from eternity to spring from the root of Jesse and the royal race of David, to take her place in this wonderful scene which we are contemplating, and be the chosen instrument in the great work of man’s redemption, of which the stable at Bethlehem is the first external manifestation. She is a mother, and yet a virgin, for that Child to which she has just given birth was formed in her, not according to the usual order of nature, but by the operation of the power of the Holy Ghost—“ Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.” Thus were fulfilled the words of the Angel announcing this great fact : “ Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus.

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High ;”* as also the words of the Prophet Isaías, spoken long before : “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and shall bear a Son.”† Yes, it is a mother and yet a virgin who is here before us ; a mother whose virginal purity remains unimpaired ; a mother from whose bowels has issued a Son, without detriment to her perfect spotlessness and integrity of soul and body, just as the rays of the sun pass through the delicate and transparent glass without the slightest fracture ; a mother who, as the shadow of sin had hitherto never passed upon her, because she had been conceived and born without sin in order to qualify her for her high and holy motherhood, was to retain the beauty of her holy incorruption, and remain a pure and spotless virgin—Mary ever Virgin, even to the end of time and throughout eternity.

Again, that little Infant—who is He ? “Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord ;” “God of God, Very God of Very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made ; Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and *was made Man*.” Yes, that little Child lying there in the manger is God, our very God and yet a very Man—*God made Man*. Oh, what inconceivable words ! What an inexpressible thought ! That He Who was the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God from all eternity, should have taken our human nature upon Him, taken our flesh, formed by the agency of the Spirit of God

* St. Luke i. 31, 32.

† Isaías vii. 14.

out of the pure flesh of that Virgin Mother, so that our manhood should be joined on, without mixture, without confusion, to the divine nature of the eternal Son of God, and in the one Person of Jesus Christ the two natures of God and man should be united in such a way as never again to be separated throughout the everlasting ages.

Yes, my dear brethren, that little Child in the manger there, I repeat it, is God—your God and mine, and yet our elder brother, the Son of God and yet the Son of man; Whom the Father has sent to redeem us, to be the Saviour, the Lord, and the King of His people, the Lord of this wide world and all that it contains. According to the words of the Prophet Isaias: “For a Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us; and the government is upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace.”

Last of all, who is the third figure that we see before us in the stable? That of Joseph. And who was Joseph? As I have said, the just man who was chosen to watch over Jesus and Mary. And he, too, though his outward aspect bears the marks of honest poverty, is yet no mean man. He comes from the lofty line of David, though reduced to earn his bread by the carpenter's trade. There he stands, in all the noble simplicity of one who, from his youth up, has kept his manhood pure and perfect, and watched over his soul, and done his duty well in the lowly path which God had marked out for him in the world. There he stands, bending down in respect and humi-

lity before the manger, filled with awe and reverent wonder at the great work which that same God has now given him to do.

In one word, then, we have set before us in this stable of Bethlehem three beings, incomparably the highest who have ever appeared or ever will appear upon this earth of ours. This is absolutely true of two of them with respect to all the personal qualities and attributes which constitute true human greatness, even if we may not affirm it of the third. But with respect to all three we may make the assertion absolutely as to elevation of dignity and office. I mean no greater personages have ever been seen in this world since it was made than Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, for of no other three has it been said that one was the Word made Flesh—the God-Man, come to redeem and rule mankind; the second, the very mother of that God-Man—the mother of God; and the third, the divinely-appointed guardian of those other two, so highly favoured, so highly exalted.

Yes, my dear brethren, I repeat it, we are contemplating to-day the highest and greatest ones that have ever issued from, that will ever spring from the loins of Adam. What are earthly kings, and mighty conquerors, and wisest sages, in comparison with these? Nothingness; the puppets of a day; ashes and dust and nothingness.

We are thus, then, brought to the point from which we started. All things call upon us to rejoice and be glad to-day at this great sight which our eyes behold—men and Angels, and the Holy Church, and God Himself from Heaven. But again I say we

might ask—"How can we rejoice at the things we see?" For, what is it we see? Jesus and Mary and Joseph, so great, so high, so noble, raised so incomparably in merit and dignity above all human things, debased to the lowliest condition, sunk in the deepest poverty, exposed to hardships from which the great bulk of men are ordinarily exempted. Yes, we see these great persons, driven from human habitations, and forced to shelter themselves from the winter's cold by the poor covering of a filthy stable. This is the lodging of the Mother of God! This is the palace of the descendant of a line of kings! This is the birth-place of the mighty King! This the cradle of our God made Man! And yet you tell us to rejoice; that our hearts should overflow with joy and gladness to-day. How can this thing be with such a scene before us? What great mystery is this?

Well, my dear brethren, you are right. It is a mystery, a great mystery—a mystery of humility and a mystery of love. But it is precisely in this, that such a mystery is presented to us by the stable at Bethlehem, that we find the deepest, most solid ground for our great joy to-day. It is the seemliest title on which we can found it. For, as I have said, it speaks to us, like the Incarnation itself, of humiliation and love. Of humiliation surely, for it was not enough for God to become Man, for the Word to take our flesh, though this might have seemed to be a humiliation which could hardly be surpassed, but when He appeared in the world in our nature it was thus that He appeared, in the humblest form, under the rags and reproach of the deepest poverty. Why

this? Why did Jesus Christ thus stoop so low? My dear brethren, it is only another manifestation, and there were still deeper and more striking manifestations of it, as we know, as His life passed on, of the great principle of that method by which He came to save us—that is to say, the way of humiliation and suffering. We might dwell upon the various reasons which may be supposed to have led our Saviour to choose this way of redeeming us; for instance, that such a plan was best adapted to satisfy for our sins; or to teach us to despise the world, or the things of this world; or to impress upon us that the desire of the riches and honour of this world are apt to be men's greatest stumbling-blocks in the work of salvation; or again, that as pride caused man's fall, so his restoration was to be accomplished by the means of humiliation. These and other motives may be suggested, but I think all may be summed up in that one word, *love*. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that all that believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And the Son of God so loved the world that He willingly offered Himself to His Father for us, and that He chose to come to us in poverty and humiliation and suffering, to show us how deep His love was for us, that He would shrink from nothing so that He might save our souls. Yes truly, Bethlehem speaks to us of the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of Jesus Christ for us, and addresses itself to the hearts of poor sinners in accents of gentlest tenderness, exhorting them to have confidence in Him Who has given such marks.

of His love and desire to help them. The Babe cries out from the manger to-day to every soul which is stained with sin—"Come to Me, come and be converted, come and be cleansed, come and be forgiven, come that you may have peace, that you may be able to join in the great joy of the Church to-day. Nothing can give peace and joy and rest save the sense of My love; surely I have given you proofs enough of that love. Come and claim your share in it, that you, too, may have a part in the common gladness which fills the souls of the children of God, and join with them with a free and thankful heart—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill." "

I will now ask you to dwell with me briefly upon what I consider to be the great practical lesson which the circumstances connected with the birth of our Lord are intended to teach us. That lesson no doubt was to teach us to have right notions about a thing which is in very bad odour with the world at large, and that is *poverty*.

Now we must bear in mind that our Lord not only came to save us, and chose this way of saving us that He might the more show His love for us; but He came also to be our example, to teach us how by the help of His grace we might, if I may say so, save ourselves. Everything, therefore, every circumstance connected with His life, has a most important practical bearing in relation to our own lives and conduct. Nothing was done at random, if I may venture to say so, in the life of Jesus Christ; every step in it, from first to last, was the

result of eternal forethought and all-wise design. Nothing was done in the whole course of His life without the deepest reason ; as indeed, how could infinite reason act otherwise than reasonably ? It is this thought that gives such profound significance to the stable and manger of Bethlehem. The poverty of that wretched hovel was not the effect of mere chance, but was deliberately chosen, and willingly and designedly assumed by Jesus Christ when He came to be born into the world ; and it was so chosen to set us an example, that we might follow His steps.

Now, as I have said, poverty is a thing which is in very bad odour with the world. The world's estimate of it is expressed by the saying, Poverty is a crime. But even if men stop short of accepting this saying as a truth, they agree almost without exception in regarding poverty as a thing which is to be kept at as great a distance as possible, and if it cannot be kept at a distance, they then make up their minds that, as when a thing cannot be cured it must be endured, they must needs bear it as best they can. There can be no doubt but that this is the general sentiment of mankind on this subject at the present day. It shows itself under every conceivable form in the society by which we are surrounded and in the world at large. What notion is more prominently impressed upon the face of modern society, and most significantly expressed in its whole life and action than this—that it is the great end of man to make money, to grow rich ? No matter much how the money is made, so that it is made. Here the end sanctifies the means. There will be

nothing wrong in a bubble company ; or at any rate, if it be not quite the right thing, it will be indulgently winked at, so that success ensures the end—so that money is made. Fraudulent speculations will be condoned in the man who fills his money-bags by them ; that is a gilding which covers all alloy. Light weights and measures, the palming off of bad goods upon unsuspecting customers, the oppression of the poor in matters of this sort will always find ways of excuse so long as it be not found out. And men have become so possessed with the worship of this golden calf, they have pushed this idolatry of money so far, as to make material prosperity the test of truth, the mark of a standing or a falling church.

Now doubtless, my dear brethren, there is some, I will not say excuse, but some reason for men thinking in this way about poverty and riches ; some reason, because nature, if left to itself, would lead them so to think. For poverty is not a pleasant object for human nature to contemplate, far less for a man to bring home into his house. Poverty suggests the notion of enforced self-denial, of stinting, of necessary moderation in the enjoyment of the things of this world, of privation—nay, even sometimes of pinching and distress. And these are not pleasant to the natural man to have impressed upon him, whether he will or no.

Again, money and all that follows upon its possession have naturally great attractions for us. It is pleasant to be looked up to in the world, and a man who has money is sure to be looked up to, no matter how he has come by it, no matter if he has

nothing else that can in any way command our respect. Then, the rich man can do in certain respects all that he pleases ; he can go and come as he likes, he is not forced to begin his day of hard work at six o'clock in the morning and have to keep hard at it till six o'clock at night. He need never say no to himself, he can gratify all his fancies, pamper his appetite ; the world, in fact, seems to lie at his feet, and to have been made for his pleasure. All these things are very agreeable, very flattering to human nature when left to itself.

But now, my dear brethren, comes a very grave question ; are we to judge of this matter according to the dictates of our fallen nature, or has any higher and better standard of judgment been supplied to us ?

The scene at Bethlehem upon which we have been meditating to-day furnishes us with an answer. If Bethlehem says one thing to us more than another, it is this : No, we must not decide between poverty and riches by the maxims of a corrupted world ; and why ? Because Jesus Christ Himself has given us a higher rule by which to judge, and that is His own example. He might have chosen riches, but He did not ; He chose poverty, a life of toil, privation, and hardship, and we can find no reason why He did so accept this : that by such a choice He wished to teach us that poverty is for us a safer state than riches ; safer, that is, with a view to the great end for which we were created and placed in this world—eternity. And by the very fact that He so selected it, He has ennobled it, and raised it so as to constitute

it a higher state than that which all the wealth and power of this world can bestow.

Yes, this is certainly true, if God's words be true. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are ye poor—for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven." "Hearken, my dearest brethren: hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which God hath promised to those that love Him."*

Poverty then in itself is a more blessed state, a safer state than that of riches and power. Jesus Christ has decided the question for us. I do not of course mean to say that every man who is making money by the worthy exercise of an honest calling, that every man to whom God has entrusted power and riches without toil and seeking of his own, is in such a state that he cannot save his soul. God forbid! Such men can be poor in spirit, can live in the midst of wealth without fixing their hearts upon it, can employ their worldly means for the promotion of God's glory and the solace of their fellow-men, and thus secure a heavenly crown. All that I say is, that their state, viewed simply in itself, is not so high a state as that of the poor man; that it is not so safe a state. Indeed, our Lord tells us so in so many words; for while He says, "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven," He likewise says, "How hard it is for them that have riches to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!" "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom

* St. James ii. 5.

of God." These words admit of no mistake ; they are so plain that he who runs may read.

Poverty then is a safer state, and for this reason : that, as the Apostle solemnly declares, "The desire of money is the root of all evils."* And because it cuts a man off from so many temptations to which the rich man is exposed, it very often forces a man to say no in that which it concerns his salvation that he should say no, when it is very doubtful whether he would be able to exercise self-control if the means were at hand for satisfying his desires.

But we must guard against mistake in this matter. Poverty is a higher state than riches, a safer state. Does it follow that every poor man will therefore necessarily save his soul? I wish I could say so. But no ; he is only in a condition in which he may save his soul most easily. The man who vainly struggles against his lot, who repines at his condition, and envies that of other men, who does not recognise the blessedness and security of the state in which God has placed him—that man is in a fair way to lose his soul. But to the man who bravely accepts God's dispensation, who accepts the state of poverty not merely because he must, because there is no help for it, who thankfully acknowledges the security in which it places him as to temptation, who manfully and honestly does his duty in it, depending upon the hand of God in all and through all, whatever difficulties and trials may beset his way, a life of poverty is certainly the way to Heaven. Such a man, though he is poor, is yet the only truly rich man ; though he

* 1 Tim. vi. 10.

is poor, yet he possesses all things ; for he enjoys the friendship of God, and the certainty of His promise, that all needful things shall be supplied to him. Thus the wise man says : " One is as it were rich, when he hath nothing, and another is as it were poor, when he hath great riches." *

Oh, my dear brethren, let us beg of the Child of Bethlehem to impress upon all our minds this great principle which He preaches to us from the manger to-day ; to make it a practical principle in our hearts, and to make the world at large more alive to it. Oh, if men would but listen to what Jesus Christ says on this matter, as well as on many other matters, what a different world this of ours would be ! It will not be different till it does listen to Him, till it stoops to listen to His teaching. When that will be, we know not ; only this is certain, that the longer it refuses to listen, the more suffering it must undergo. Let us pray that His chastisements may not be heavier than we can bear ; but that He will come speedily with an outstretched arm, come as He came on the first Christmas morning ; come to renew the dying faith of a wretched world, and rescue it from itself, its own vain fancies and strong delusions ; come once more as the dayspring from on high, scattering light and healing, and peace and pardon from His wings. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus !

T. B. PARKINSON, S.J.

* Prov. xiii. 7.

S U M M A R Y.

SERMON III.

THE CIRCUMCISION A LESSON OF PURITY.

Et postquam consummati sunt dies octo ut circumcideretur Puer, vocatum est nomen Ejus JESUS.

After eight days were accomplished that the Child should be circumcised, His name was called JESUS. (St. Luke ii. 21.)

CIRCUMCISION the rite by which, under the old law, men were admitted into fellowship with God's people and made partakers of His promises. Its outward part. Our Lord was not obliged to submit to circumcision, but He chose to do so for our sakes, not for His own.

St. Paul's teaching concerning circumcision of the heart—the cutting off of all bad affections. Necessity of this in consequence of the Fall; our whole work and conflict as Christians consists in this.

We may well, then, consider some of the motives for earnestness in this work. At present we confine ourselves to those drawn from the state of men who do not deny their appetites. We may consider what God has said and what He has done concerning such men.

1. The words of God. Ezechiel, St. Paul, the Apocalypse.
2. The actions of God. The Flood. The destruction of the Cities of the Plain. The description of their condition given by the Prophet Ezechiel examined. Their fair outside and inward corruption.
3. Other motives. Such men act in a way unworthy of their manhood; (1) because they make reason subject to appetite; (2) because they lower themselves to the level of the beasts. We are also to consider that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost. True manliness of a man who restrains his passions.

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(Words taken from the 21st verse of the 2nd chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.)

CIRCUMCISION, my dear brethren, was the sacred rite of the old law by which men were admitted into fellowship with God's people, and made partakers of His promises, just as baptism is the sacrament of the new law by which men become sharers in all the blessings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And as baptism has an outward sign, the washing of water, by which is signified the inward washing and cleansing of the soul by the grace of the Holy Spirit which takes place therein, so circumcision, too, had its own outward sign, and that of a nature which indicated the spiritual meaning of the rite itself. This outward sign was of a kind which involved pain and the loss of blood; what its spiritual signification was we shall see presently.

It is our Blessed Saviour's submission to this rite of circumcision that the Church celebrates and calls upon us to meditate upon to-day. We can picture to ourselves our Infant Saviour, a tender Babe, and

yet our God, in the arms of His Blessed Mother, and in the presence of St. Joseph and other witnesses, undergoing this painful ceremony, and shedding the first drops of that Blood which was afterwards to be entirely poured out for us on the Cross. He, by doing this, presented Himself under the garb and aspect of a sinner, for, by the fact that He was without sin, He was exempted from the obligation to be circumcised. Why, then, did He voluntarily subject Himself to the pain and humiliation of circumcision?

There is no other answer to be given, my dear brethren, than that which meets us in every action and circumstance of the life of Jesus Christ. It was for us that He did this, and not for Himself; it was for us, too, that He might thereby set us an example how to follow His steps. It was part of the divine law that those who wished to enter into the covenant or agreement which God first made with Abraham, and afterwards renewed more at large with the Jewish people through Moses, should submit to be circumcised. By so doing, all God's promises were assured to them, and especially their share in the promised redemption by the future Saviour of the world. All male children, too, born of Jewish parents, were ordered to undergo the same rite, that the same blessings might be ensured to them likewise. Jesus Christ, being born of a Jewish maiden of the royal line of David, though He could have no need of a title to these promised blessings, for He had come to win and bestow them, yet chose to conform to the divine ordinance, in order to teach us a great

lesson—that of submission to rightly-constituted law and order. I might say a good deal on this point, but I do not wish to dwell upon it this morning, especially as, before long, I shall have a more fitting occasion for speaking to you on the subject. To-day I want particularly to call your attention to the spiritual meaning of the rite of circumcision itself.

Now St. Paul, in speaking of circumcision, speaks of a circumcision which is in the flesh, and of a “circumcision of the heart in the spirit,”* and he says that the mere circumcision in the flesh avails nothing unless it be accompanied by the circumcision of the heart. In other words, he teaches us that the spiritual meaning of circumcision was the cutting off from the heart of all bad affections which might come between it and Almighty God, and especially those “carnal desires” which, St. Peter tells us, “war against the soul.”† For, amongst many others, this is one of the evil consequences of that original sin in which we are born, that there is “a law in our members fighting against the law of our mind,”‡ and perpetually striving to bring us into captivity to the law of sin and death. This was not so at the beginning, while our first parents retained that high and happy state of original justice in which they were placed at their creation. In our first father, Adam, the lower part of our nature was in complete subjection to the higher, while the whole man was elevated, illuminated, and directed by the abiding presence of God’s sanctifying grace in his soul, so that all his powers worked together in perfect harmony, and in full conformity

* Rom. ii. 28, 29. † I St. Peter ii. 11. ‡ Rom. vii. 23.

with the will of his Creator. There was no jarring, no clashing of opposing currents in his soul, for his will was endowed with power to master all rebellion in his lower passions and affections, and to prevent all temptations in that quarter from gaining an entrance there. Thus the reason, under the guidance of God's grace, like a strong man armed, kept the house, and all was peace and calm within ; no evil could come near to harm him, unless he himself deliberately willed that it should gain admittance.

But when Adam yielded to the seductions of the Evil One, and transgressed God's plain command, then came loss and ruin and all manner of desolation into the soul of man. Oh, what a change was there ! God's grace withdrawn, the harmonious subordination of man's powers forfeited, and all within him thrown into discord and disarray. Then came darkness of the understanding, weakness of the will, the license of the lower tendencies of his nature, and, as the result of all this, the sin and misery that have ever since been rampant in the world; and the hard battle that we have to fight ourselves with the enemies of our souls. And the battle must be fought out, there is no other hope for us than that. There must be the keeping down of our lower nature, and the replacing of our higher nature—under the influence of God's grace—on the throne from which it has been thrust. This is emphatically our work as Christians, so to bring ourselves into the obedience of Christ that, by following the dictates of a reason enlightened by Him, and not the promptings of passion, we may become like Him in every pure and perfect work.

It will not be out of place, then, my dear brethren, to take occasion from this Feast of the Circumcision for considering some of the motives which ought to strengthen our hands in fighting the battle in which we are engaged. And for the present we will confine ourselves to the motives which may be drawn from the consideration of the state of those who, instead of bravely following the leadings of their better nature and the promptings of God's grace, basely give themselves up as slaves to the tyranny of that law of their members of which St. Paul speaks. Now we may look at this matter from various points of view, but perhaps the most useful way of dealing with it will be to see, first of all, how Almighty God Himself regards it. We may gather this in different ways. We may hear, first of all, what the pure and holy God says about those who deliver themselves up to the evil ways of their corrupt nature ; then, again, we may learn how, from time to time, He has actually dealt with such men.

1. First, then, God's words. And here the words of the Lord in the Prophet Ezechiel, which are spoken of sin, indeed, in general, yet especially may be applied to those sins which we are now considering—"The soul that sinneth, the same shall die."* Yes, as St. Paul says, sins of this kind do indeed carry with them their own reward—"The wages of sin is death,"† death to the soul certainly, not unfrequently death to the body too. •

Again, St. Paul having told us in another place that "the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the

* Ezech. xviii. 20.

† Rom. vi. 23.

spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary one to another,"* goes on to tell us what the works of the flesh are, and amongst them enumerates "fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury, murders, drunkenness, and such like, of which I tell you, as I have before told you, that they who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God." Then again, in the Apocalypse, Almighty God Himself says: "But the fearful, the unbelieving, the abominable, and all liars, they shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."†

Clearly enough, then, my dear brethren, the wages of sins of this kind is death. And what a death! not the mere dissolution of the body, but "the second death," the eternal death of soul and body, the everlasting ruin of the immortal being who has, by his sins, separated himself from the love of God for ever and for ever.

2. But let us now turn to God's acts in dealing with such sins. We know the story of the Flood, by which the race of mankind, with the exception of Noah and his family, who were saved in the ark, were swept from the face of the earth. And why was this? Almighty God Himself tells us: "My Spirit shall not remain in man for ever,"‡ and why? "Because he is flesh," that is to say, because he has given himself up to the desires of his lower nature, to fulfil the works of the flesh, so that "all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth."§ Therefore He said: "I will destroy them from off the face

* Gal. v. 17.

† Apoc. xxi. 8.

‡ Gen. vi. 3.

§ *Ibid.* vi. 12.

of the earth." Think, then, of the terrible consequences of the sins here pointed out to us; the floods bearing down upon the sinful world, destroying the smiling face of that earth which God had made so beautiful, and sweeping away the whole family of man in one vast destruction. It is thus that God sometimes bares His arm, and smites with awful severity, that there may be no mistake about the meaning of His words, no room for doubt as to whether He really wills that His commandments should be obeyed or not.

Then, again, we have the swift destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, those stately cities situated in the midst of a smiling land, crowned with all the fruits of a fertile soil, teeming with all the blessings of plenty, and beautiful as the Garden of the Lord—we know their end. The fiery rain descended upon them, the earth opened and swallowed them, and the place where they had stood was smitten with the curse of a desolation which broods over it even to the present day. And why was this? The same story, the same reason, though under an aggravated form. "They had gone after strange flesh;" crimes had been committed in those cities which we cannot even name, and so the cry of their abominations had gone up before God, till they could be no longer borne, and the sentence at length went forth that they should be blotted out from the face of the earth. The terrible vengeance came down, and those fair cities and all that they contained were no more seen among men.

It will be worth while briefly to notice here what

the Prophet Ezechiel tells us about the gradual progress of Sodom in the ways of sin, till she attained to that growth of wickedness which could be no longer borne. These are the words which God utters by his mouth: "Behold, this was the iniquity of Sodom—*pride, fulness of bread*, and abundance, and the idleness of her and of her daughters; and they did not put forth their hand to the needy and to the poor; and they were lifted up and committed abominations before me; and I took them away as thou hast seen."* These words are well worthy of being weighed and pondered on at all times, but especially in the days in which we live. Mark well the successive steps which led to Sodom's height of iniquity and consequent downfall. First comes *pride*, then *fulness of bread*—pampering of soul and body, then the issue of these, *idleness*, the idleness which comes from pride that will not stoop to labour, to do the work which God has appointed for all men in this world of labour—work which will promote God's glory, and confer blessings on themselves and their fellow-men; idleness, too, which comes from the fulness of bread, from the over-pampered appetite, and unfits a man for the energetic fulfilment of his duties towards God and man. These are the first steps, and *selfishness* follows in their train—"They stretched not out their hand to the poor and needy." No; the proud man, the idle man, soon comes to have no thought but for self, for the gratification of self, of his own whims, his own appetites, and finally his own bad passions, and then quickly follows the

* Ezech. xvi. 49, 50.

cry of nameless abominations, which call out to God day and night for punishment and repression. This, then, was the state of Sodom in its last palmy day of opulence and crime.* It was beautiful to look upon ; its streets stretched far and wide, studded with stately mansions, in which there was all that could gratify and minister to a life of luxurious ease. The sound of pipe and tabor was heard in its palaces, its crowded ways were alive with the restless movements of trade and commerce, and enlivened by the presence of its luxurious daughters as they swept along in quest of pleasure or amusement in their trappings of pride. All was pleasant to the eye, flattering to the senses ; no wonder that Sodom was lifted up. But this was only the outside shell ; in reality it was like the whited sepulchres of which our Saviour speaks, for under this glitter of outside show there in reality rested the rottenness as of dead men's bones. Yes ; under this specious external civilisation, as men would term it now-a-days, there lay concealed all the foulness and filthiness which it was possible for corrupt nature to defile itself with and to wallow in. The hard selfishness of injustice and oppression, the refined selfishness of sensuality and passion, were rioting under that beautiful mask ; and amidst the excitements of pleasure and the blandishments of idleness, the cry of the wronged, the moans of inno-

* "Fili ad istud diligenter attendere debes, ut in omni loco et actione seu occupatione externa, sis intus liber et *tui ipsius potens*, et sint omnia *sub te*, et *tu non sub eis*, ut sis Dominus actionum tuarum et rector, non servus nec emptitius. . . . Qui stant super presentia et speculantur æterna ; qui transitoria sinistro intuentur oculo, et dextro cælestia."—A'Kempis, l. iii., c. 38.

cence betrayed, the last groans of starvation, could not be heard, or if heard were not listened to, as something beneath the notice of those who were raised to a sphere far beyond the reach of all such common things.

Yet more, beneath that outside shell so smooth, so full of all external pleasantness, so complete in all its harmonious decencies and etiquettes, so well guarded against all that could shock, or pain, or wound, beneath lay festering depths of unnamed depravity, undermining all the foundations of that stately internal fabric. There were the dens of vice, the hidden resorts of abominable sin, the haunts of the outcasts of mankind where all around breathed misery and pollution.

Such doubtless was the mixture which Sodom presented to the eye of God in her high and palmy day, when all things went well with her, when her name was a name of pleasure, and pride, and power, when the world seemed only made to minister to her wants and luxuries, and to resound her praises. Yet we know what God thought of her.

My dear brethren, is there nothing in this picture which we can apply to ourselves—our pride, our high prosperity, our place of eminence in the world, and shall I not add our sins, even at this present time? God's eye rests upon us as it did of old on Sodom, the queenly city; what does He think of us, of this England of ours; of its wealth, of its social state, of its hidden festering woes of foulness, and misery, and crime? Is there no matter for serious thought here to us, to the men of this generation, who profess to

be the wise of the earth, and wiser than their fathers were? Grave matter for thought indeed; but we must not pursue it further to-day.

3. To return to our more immediate subject. We have seen sufficiently from the two instances which I have brought forward—and if necessary the instances which show how God has actually dealt with sinners of this kind might be multiplied—how God regards sins of the nature of which we are speaking. Yes, it is a fearful thing for such men to “fall into the hands of the living God.” There can be no doubt how He looks upon them, how He will deal with them if they pass before His judgment-seat with sins like this upon their souls. This surely ought to be motive enough to excite us to a manly struggle for self-mastery, even if no other were forthcoming. But there are other motives, one of which I will briefly bring before you.

I suppose you will all agree with me, that there is nothing upon which a man prides himself so much as his manhood. It is the last reproach, the last disgrace that a man can undergo, to forfeit his title to that manhood, to be told, and especially to be told truly, that he has acted in a manner unworthy of it. Now that is exactly what the men whose case we are considering do—They act in a way entirely unworthy of their manhood, and by so doing forfeit their right to the name and title of a man. I will prove this to you by one or two plain reasons.

1. First of all, we shall all agree in this, that it is his reason, his intelligence, his understanding, his intellectual part, and not the mere possession of flesh

and bones, of a body, however strong and well-shaped and beautiful it may be, which makes a man to be in deed and truth a man. Reason is that divine spark which resides in the soul that God has given him, the participation of the divine intelligence, the Eternal Word which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world, that light by which he ought to guide his steps and regulate all his actions.

But if this be so, what is it that the man does who gives himself up to the tyranny of his lower passions? He acts against his higher nature, he acts against his reason and its higher instincts and tendencies; he acts, that is, precisely against his own nature, and therefore he acts in a way unworthy of a man. What right and title therefore has he to call himself a man? He has forfeited all claim; he is not fit to be called a man.

2. Again: there is a second reason why the man who gives himself up to his passions has lost the right to the name of a man. It is this, that he has lowered himself to the level of the beasts that perish. That he does this is plain; for he has abandoned the principles of reason by which as a man he ought to guide himself, and he acts according to the principles by which the beasts of the field guide themselves. They simply follow greedily after that which pleases and gratifies the body, for they have nothing else to gratify; and this is precisely his rule of action. In what then is he better than they? "Man when he was in honour," says the Psalmist, "did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is

become like unto them."* Yes, he has not even the wit, such a man as we are speaking of, to see how high and precious is that gift of reason by which he is constituted a man ; he despises it and casts it into the mud, and tramples it underfoot, preferring to follow those lower passions by which he is made like unto the swine.

Nay, a wise old heathen† has told us that such a man lowers himself below the beasts, and is worse than they—in the first place with respect to himself, because he has made the mistress of his soul, that is, reason, subject to a slave, that is, to concupiscence and passion, and thus reversed the order of God's appointments ; and in the second place with respect to others, for as of all creatures the best and most useful is the man who acts according to reason, so the vilest and most hurtful of all is the man who is abandoned to his passions. He ruins himself, and as far as he is concerned, he renders all social order impossible.

Yet again : What is it that distinguishes man from the beasts ? Is it not this, that man can think of and aspire after future and eternal things ? While the beast eats, and drinks, and labours, and dies, and so comes to an end, man has placed before his eyes the lofty heights of the never-ending glories before God's throne. He knows that that is his end, his high and noble destiny. Man walks the earth erect and upright, so that he can raise his eyes to Heaven, which is his home ; the beast must crawl along the

* Ps. xlviii. 13

† Arist. Ethic, l. viii., c. 6., S. Th., ii. 2, q. 64, a. 2 ad 3.

ground, unable to elevate his regards beyond the earth on which he treads. But the man who follows his lower nature sets all these considerations at naught, and is content to fix his eyes and grovel on the ground with the beasts that have no understanding.

There is just one more consideration, the most weighty one, and with that I will conclude. Man's soul is not only the home of reason, but the Christian man's soul, your souls, my dear brethren, are the temples of the Holy Ghost. So St. Paul tells us : " Know you not that you are the temple of God ; and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ? " * By virtue of our baptism, by virtue of our membership in Jesus Christ, such is our high and awful privilege. Temples of the Holy Ghost ; the dwelling-place of that pure and holy Presence ! What shall be said of the men who defile these dwelling-places, these temples of God ? Suppose some one were to pollute this church in which we worship, to put it to unworthy uses, to desecrate it by making it the receptacle of vile and filthy things, to drive away the Divine Presence from the altar, and leave it in the plight of some dilapidated and deserted grange ? What should we think of actions like these, how should we feel about them, what should we say concerning them ?

And yet the man who is the slave of his passions does worse than this, inasmuch as his body and soul form a fairer and nobler temple than any that was ever built with human hands. What defilement, what desecration is such a man not guilty of ? The soul

* I Cor. iii. 16.

the abode of foul and most unworthy thoughts, the body disgraced and ruined by all nameless abominations. Alas! what is such a man preparing for himself but the execution of the divine sentence—"If any one violate the temple of God, him will God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are."*

Let us turn from this side of the picture, my dear brethren, and look upon the man who is keeping that place in the scale of being to which he has been raised by His Creator and Redeemer. Such a man is a spectacle worth looking at. He is responding nobly and bravely to the aspirations of his higher nature, he is making reason, enlightened by God's grace, his guiding light, he is keeping a firm hand upon the ignoble cravings of sensuality, he is walking upright, with his eyes fixed on the eternal things for which he was created; in a word, he is the slave of no one, the master of himself, the servant and friend and son of God. The devils fear such a man, the Angels and the Saints rejoice over him, and the Heart of our Divine Lord is satisfied, because in that true man He reaps some fruit from His Passion. Let us try to be such a man as this, acting upon the words of the Apostle: "For the rest, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things,"† and do them.

T. B. PARKINSON, S.J.

* 1 Cor. iii. 17.

† Phil. iv. 8.

S U M M A R Y.

SERMON IV.

THE PURIFICATION AND PRESENTATION A LESSON OF HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE.

Et postquàm impleti sunt dies purgationis ejus, secundùm legem Moysi, tulerunt illum in Jerusalem, ut sisterent eum Domino.

And when the days of her purification were fulfilled, according to the Law of Moses, they brought Him to Jerusalem to offer Him to the Lord.

(St. Luke ii. 22.)

THE visit to the Temple an act of obedience. How perfectly performed !

It was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Aggeus. A difficulty proposed and met. True glory consists in a clear knowledge of a thing with praise. Human glory tested by this definition ; the glory (1.) of a warrior, (2.) of a statesman, (3.) of a monied man.

The obedience of Jesus and Mary to the Law is our model. Obedience lies at the root of Christianity ; obedience to God ; obedience to those who hold the place of God.

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(Words taken from the 22nd verse of the 2nd chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.)

LET us, first of all, my dear brethren, try to place before our eyes the persons here spoken of. They were the parents of Jesus—Mary and Joseph, and the young Child Himself. They have come to the Temple of the Lord in obedience to the Law of Moses, with a twofold object: first, to offer the Infant Saviour to the Eternal Father, according to the prescription of the Law that the first-born of every creature should be so offered, in memory of the deliverance of the first-born of Israel in Egypt from the stroke of the destroying Angel by whom the first-born in every house of the Egyptians was smitten; and, secondly, to make the offering required of every mother after child-bearing, in token of thanksgiving, and in acknowledgment of the need of purification. It is to fulfil these requirements of the Law that they have now entered the House of God, and it is worth our while to watch them and see how they behave in it. Observe the Blessed Virgin, with her precious charge in her arms, what

calm deep awe is impressed upon every line of her figure, calm and deep, but modest and without exaggeration; what tranquil holy joy lights up her countenance; there is everything that betokens the heartfelt sense of the creature who finds herself in the more immediate presence of her Creator, the confiding love of the child who finds herself in her natural home, as it were, in the home of her Eternal Father. And then, again, look at St. Joseph. With what quiet manly respect and reverence he bends down as he crosses the threshold of the Holy House. The world is left behind, its noise is hushed in his heart, vain thoughts of self trouble him not, his whole soul is filled with the thought, This is none other than the House of God, this is the Gate of Heaven. And this is the spirit and deportment which Mary and Joseph preserve during the appointed services; their attention does not relax, their minds are not open to distractions; they carry out the great rule—*Do what you are doing*; they are there to worship, and they *do* worship, and nothing else besides; they are there to pray, and they *do* pray, that and nothing else. They afford us matter, do they not, my dear brethren, in this respect for imitation and self-examination. Do we do here in God's House what we are doing; what we profess to be doing? Do we bring respect and reverence with us, the spirit of peace and holy joy, the spirit of thanksgiving and supplication? Do we worship? Do we pray?

Now, with respect to this Presentation of our Lord in the Temple, this appearance of the long expected Redeemer in the Holy Place, it had been

foretold long ago by one of the old Prophets, and that in a very striking way. The Prophet Aggeus says—"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Yet a little while, and I will move heaven and earth, the sea and the dry land; and I will move the nations, and *the Desired of all nations shall come*, and I will fill this House with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts."* The House here spoken of is the very Temple of Jerusalem in which we are now contemplating the Holy Family; and this promise was made concerning it by way of comfort and encouragement to the Jews, who were engaged in rebuilding their Temple after their return from the long captivity in Babylon. It was a hard task, for they remembered, or had been told of, the glories of that magnificent Temple which was raised by Solomon, and after standing but a comparatively short time, as one of the wonders of the world, had been so ruthlessly destroyed by the Babylonians; and remembering these glories, and conscious of the smallness of their present means and resources, they were discouraged in their work by the thought of how far short the new Temple must come of the gorgeous structure in which their ancestors had worshipped. But God encourages them with the promise that a greater glory shall rest upon this second Temple, poor and mean though it may be in comparison, than ever rested on the first. For this second House shall be filled with the glory of the living presence of the Desired of all nations, of the Redeemer, Restorer, and Comforter of mankind.

And so, as on this day, this great promise is

* Aggeus ii. 7, 8.

fulfilled; the Desired One has come to His Temple, for there He is in very presence in the arms of His Blessed Mother, and aged Simeon and holy Anna are blessed with the actual enjoyment of that for which they have longed and watched and prayed.

But let us pause here awhile. How can this be? How can it in truth be said that this day sees the fulfilment of this old prophecy of which we have been speaking? Let us consider it again, examine and weigh well the words in which it is conveyed. It speaks of the coming of the Desired of all nations. Yes! but it speaks of His coming in glory. "I will fill this House with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts." We see that the Desired One has come. There can be no doubt of that. There He is in His Temple. But where is the glory? That we do not see. We see a humble group in the raiment of honest decent poverty. We see the Divine Infant enveloped in homely garments. There is nothing in this group that attracts attention; Simeon and Anna, it is true, have been guided to it, but for the rest, those that pass in and out of the Temple hardly bestow a glance upon it. There is nothing that causes them to do so, for they have before them only a sight which may be seen every day in the House of God. *Where then is the glory?* We cannot see how this part of the prophecy has been fulfilled.

Again, let us pause and consider. Is it true that there is no glory manifested in the fact and circumstances of the event which we are contemplating? What is glory? St. Thomas, following St. Ambrose, tells us that glory is nothing else than

“the clear knowledge of a thing with praise.”* In other words, when we have clearly penetrated a thing, a circumstance, a character, so as to know it thoroughly, and from that knowledge are able to think well of it, speak well, nay, very highly, of it, and surround it, as it were, by an atmosphere of praise, then that thing, circumstance, or person is invested with and in the possession of glory; the notion of glory is from thenceforth attached to and associated with it. Here then we have a test by which we may try men and things, and determine whether they are really glorious or not, if they claim so high a title. And many things in this world do claim to be glorious—many things which are not so. While, on the other hand, many things lie hidden from the eyes of men to which, were they known, true glory would be attached even in this world, and shall most certainly be attached throughout eternity. A man goes forth at the head of mighty armies, and gains victories which shall be renowned to the end of time, and his enemies lie prostrate before him, and the world is filled with his name, and all men speak of the great things he has done—he is looked upon as one who has reached the summit of this world’s glory. But if, when we examine more closely into things, it be found that the stately march of his armies, the glitter of all the pomp and circumstance of war, hide from our view the hitherto smiling and fruitful fields which have been unjustly trampled on and ravaged; if the blast

* St. Thomas, 1, 2, q. ii., a. 3. “Gloria est clara notitia cum laude” (St. Amb.).

of his trumpets and the strains of his martial music drown the cries of oppressed nations, whose rights have been ruthlessly overthrown: if we could pry into that man's heart and trace the secret motives at work therein, mark, perchance, the workings of vanity, ambition, and pride—what of his glory then? Does the knowledge of the true state of things constrain our praise, or does it not rather enkindle deep reprobation and lively indignation? What is that man before God, to Whom alone all these things can be fully known? Is he worthy of praise? Is he praised, and therefore glorious in His sight, with Whom alone can be true glory, for He only can reach the depths of things and weigh them in the balance and infallibly determine what it is that merits praise and what that merits blame?

Or, again, take the statesman who has grown grey in the councils of Kings, and wielded the power and guided the destinies of mighty nations, and all things seem to have prospered with him, so that he is at the height of earthly renown; the question still returns—What about this glory? Is it real? Does it bear the test of the all-seeing, all-searching Eye of God? What have been his motives, what his aims, what his principles of action and policy during his long career? Have they been pure and lofty, noble and disinterested, public spirited and just? Has he kept *the right* in view, and the right upon which alone the true happiness of nations can be solidly grounded, and made that the guiding light of all his course? Or has he been a mere self-seeker, working for the gratification of his own love of power

and the furtherance of his own private ends, acting on mere maxims of expediency and pandering to each current of prejudice and ignorance which has agitated the minds of those whom it was given to him to govern and to guide? What of his glory then? It is no glory, for it is based on nothing which can claim our honest praise.

So take the man who has thrown himself with vigour into the struggle of this world's concerns, and successfully fought his way and triumphed over every difficulty, and won himself a "fortune and a name;" has added house to house and field to field, and surrounded himself with every luxury that the earth can bestow, so that men tire in conjecturing what may be the amount of the untold thousands which he calls his own. He stands forth before his fellows as the model of energy and successful enterprise, and is quoted as an example to all who would follow in his steps. But, still, what about his glory? If we could know all, should we be able to accord him our praise? What have been his motives? What the hidden springs of that prosperous career? Has all been honest and above board, consistent with the eternal rules of justice and right? Have there been no subtle frauds, so subtle as to evade the penetration of man, no delicate dishonesties which lie hidden far down in the secrets of that man's life, and can only be detected by the Eye of God? Again I say, What about his glory? Will it stand the light of the Judgment Day?

But I have said enough, my dear brethren, to indicate the nature of the answer to be given to our

difficulty about the manner of our Lord's appearance in His holy Temple. He is there in His Mother's arms in the garments of lowliness and humility, His true character hidden from the eyes of men; and the question is—Can it be truly said that glory accompanies his appearance, so that the old prophecy of Aggeus is fulfilled? Surely yes, if we have understood what has been said about the qualities and essential part of true glory. For glory, it is evident, consists not in the outward show and the trappings by which this world tries to express its greatness, but in that estimation which follows upon the true and real knowledge of things as they are actually found. What then is the actual state of things with reference to these holy ones that we see before us in the Temple? Who is that Infant? Our God, though hidden under that helpless form, so that men know Him not. And who is that young Mother? Holy Mary, the lily among thorns, the purest of God's creatures and the highest, though this is as yet concealed from the eyes of men. And there is Joseph, too, the humble carpenter in appearance, and yet the just before God, one of the highest, purest, noblest of the sons of men in all that makes a man. And why is our God here, accompanied by these surroundings? Why has He humbled Himself so? Not for Himself, but for us; for He has come to save us, and to-day He commences the great work of offering Himself for us, of giving Himself during a life of toil and labour wholly for us, a work which shall only be completed as far as this world is concerned when He cries out, *Consummatum est*—

"It is finished," on the Cross ; but which shall last in its enduring results throughout the ages of eternity. Yes, He is here to save us, and to teach us how to save ourselves ; for His example shines before us to-day in a special manner, as we shall see presently, and in a matter without attention to which our labour after salvation will be vain. Is there then no glory here, my dear brethren ? Yes, truly, the highest glory, if what I have said above be true. For when we come to see and know the thing as it really is, as it is in the Eyes of God, can we sufficiently estimate it, can our poor praise make any return for it ? No, truly—for here is matter for the praises of men and of Angels, of all men and of all Angels from everlasting to everlasting, and even then the great debt will remain unpaid. Yes, indeed, here is true glory—God giving Himself for His creatures, sacrificing Himself for them, and men penetrated with a sense of the benefit. And the Prophet spoke truly when he said in the name of God, "I will fill this House with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts."

But I said just now that our Lord sets before us a special lesson in the event which we are this day commemorating. Yes ; besides the great lesson of humility which all the actions of His life teach so loudly, there is a particular teaching conveyed to us in this day's solemnity. For we may ask in a very special manner why our Lord and the Blessed Virgin presented themselves in the Temple, and strictly fulfilled all the regulations of the Mosaic Law on this occasion ; in a very special manner, I say, because it is most generally admitted that neither one nor the

other was bound by the Law. From the peculiar conditions which accompanied the conception and birth of our Saviour, both one and the other were exempt from the Law, and yet observe how scrupulously they submit to it. Why was this? First, that they might not give scandal to their neighbours, who, if they had exercised their privilege, would have seen the neglect of the Law without knowing the reasons on which their exemption was grounded, and this would have been a scandal to them, besides creating a prejudice against our Lord Himself which would have proved detrimental to His ministry. This is one reason, but the second and greater reason is this—*for our example*. In all things He teaches us, not by words only but by deeds; in every action of His life there is some great practical lesson to be found, and here the lesson is that of *obediencce*. He obeyed where He was not obliged to obey, that we might learn to obey where obedience is a duty and an obligation.

Now let us weigh well the importance of this matter, and we shall do this when we reflect that this virtue of obedience really lies at the root of Christianity itself. For the religion of Jesus Christ is the religion of obedience. "Obedience is a virtue which renders the will prompt and ready to execute the will of another, viz., of another who has the right to command."* And who has a better right to command than Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master; and what is it that He commands but this—that we should accept the eternal truths that He has

* S. Th., 2, 2, q. 104, a. 2 ad 3.

made known to us and do the things that He prescribes. The man who does this, who brings "every thought into captivity to the law of Christ," and in all things guides himself according to His holy rules—such a man is a Christian indeed ; and this same truth is only expressed in another way when our Lord speaks to us in such expressions as these—"If any man will be My disciple, he must take up his Cross daily and follow Me ;" "Take My yoke upon you, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light, and you shall find peace for your souls." This is only saying the same thing in other words, for the Cross and yoke of Jesus Christ here spoken of are the faith and law of Jesus Christ, the rules of Jesus Christ, by which a man is enabled to submit his understanding to obedience of faith, his will, his passions, to the manly discipline of self-denial, by which he becomes the master of himself, more and more like Jesus Christ as he perseveres in this holy discipline, and thus more and more in every sense a man.

I repeat then, the religion of Jesus Christ is the religion of obedience ; obedience first of all and in general to the law of God, to the will of Jesus Christ. But this obligation of obedience goes down to particulars, and comprises all those who may in any way stand to us in the place of God, as participating in some sort in His authority. Thus St. Paul, speaking of the duty of subjects to render obedience to legitimate governments of whatever shape and form, says, "Let every soul be subject to higher powers, for there is no power but from God ; for those that are,

are ordained of God. He therefore that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.”*

Then again, we have the duty of children to parents: Honour thy Father and Mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. And we read in Deut. xxi. 18, the heavy penalty adjudged by the Law of Moses in the case of the disobedient son. If a father brought such a son before the judges of the city, and accused his son of disobedience, of despising his advice, and giving himself up to riotous living, to drunkenness, and uncleanness, and the son was found guilty, the punishment was that the people of the city should stone him with stones till he died.

Again, there is the duty of wives to husbands.† St. Paul instructs them that they are to love their husbands and their children, to be prudent, chaste, sober, careful of their houses, kind and subject to their husbands; that the Word of God be not blasphemed. Ah! it would be well if all wives remembered this—“that the Word of God be not blasphemed”—that those living in error may not be scandalised at the ungodly quarrellings and discords between husband and wife of which we hear too often. The neglected house, the neglected family, the injured husband, are not good guides to the truth of God. And, on the other hand, let others remember the exhortation of St. Paul: “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. So ought husbands to love their wives as their own bodies.”‡

* Rom. xiii. 1, 2; Cf. Tit. iii. 1; 1 St. Pet. ii. 13.

† Ephes. v. 25. ‡ Tit. ii. 4, 5.

Then again this great law of Christian obedience extends itself to the relations between servants and masters. Here too St. Paul instructs us: "Servants, obey your masters in the flesh, with fear and trembling in the simplicity of your hearts, as you would obey Christ."* You see how plainly the Apostle speaks—that masters are in a certain sense to servants as Christ our Lord; that in obeying them, they follow Him.

I will stop here—for it will be sufficient at present to remind you merely of the relations between Pastors and people—and finish by asking to try to comprehend clearly the great principle which lies at the bottom of our obedience to creatures like ourselves. It is this, that rulers, parents, husbands, masters, stand to us in the place of God, and are clothed with some measure of His authority, and that therefore in obeying their *just commands*, we are obeying God Himself. You see how this view of the matter elevates all our duties in these different relations of life; how the subject, the son, the husband, the servant, may turn the manly exercise of obedience in the common relations of life into acts of loving service to our God and Father in Heaven, and how those acts may become the sources of merit which shall increase the glory of their crown throughout eternity.

Yes, my dear brethren, let us try to take this high view of all our duties in life, of even the most ordinary actions by which those duties are carried out. Let us never forget, even in the commonest actions,

* Ephes. vi. 5.

that we are the sons of God. If we could bear this in mind, how differently our actions would be performed! how different our lives would be! How many of us can say that if we were suddenly called before God in the discharge of our common labours in life, that we should be quite ready for the call, doing exactly what we ought to be doing, and in the manner in which we ought to do it? And yet this is the test of a Christian life. "What I say unto you, I say unto all," says our Lord, "*watch*, for you know not when the time cometh." A holy man was once asked, while taking the innocent recreation and relaxation which was prescribed to him, in order to fit him the better for the discharge of his duties, what he would wish to be doing should our Lord appear at once? He replied, "I should wish to be taking my recreation." He meant that that was the ordinary duty prescribed for him, and which he ought to be doing at the time, and that he was trying to do it for God and to God, and that that was the best preparation for meeting the Bridegroom when He came.

Yes, that is to have the loins girt about and the lights burning. Holy Simeon and Anna acted thus, and so when the Lord came to His Temple they were ready for Him, and their eyes were open to behold that which others could not see, the Light Who was to be the Light of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel to the end of time. When He comes the second time, may we be so found ready, found watching.

T. B. PARKINSON, S.J.

SUMMARY.

SERMON V.

THE EPIPHANY THE TRIUMPH OF SIMPLICITY.

Videntes autem stellam gavisí sunt gaudio magno valde.

And seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (St. Matthew ii. 10.)

INTRODUCTION.—The text points to the simplicity of the wise Kings as their characteristic virtue. Its effects traced throughout their history.

I. Simple souls have a special capacity for joy, a deep faith, and great clearness of vision as to God's mysteries. Hence they have very great courage, and are also under the special protection of God. We see both these gifts in the Magi. They were chosen by God for a special mission—to witness to the Incarnation to the Jews and Herod, to bring about the publication of the Birth of Christ in consequence of the massacre of the Innocents, and to be the first-fruits of the Gentile Church. Their inward strength to execute their commission lay in their simplicity. They were also in a special manner protected by God's providence against the craft of their enemies, who were prepared to take advantage of their simplicity. Their fame in the Church.

II. We are sometimes inclined to look on simplicity as a beautiful natural gift, rather than as a Christian virtue which all are to aim at. God chooses for great virtues sometimes those who are naturally disposed to them, sometimes those whose character is of a contrary bent. The virtues that are founded by grace and produced by labour and diligence are the most solid and enduring. The simplicity of the Kings was the fruit of consummate sanctity, such as we see in other great Saints. It is a virtue which we must all strive to gain, and which is most especially needed for those who have to serve God in active life. What we must all have, we all can gain. Simplicity is founded on faith; it requires great watchfulness over self. Faith must be fed by holy contemplation and consideration of God, His works, and the great truths. We must aim at great purity of intention; and we must add to this the practice of perfect charity towards others.

CONCLUSION.—The joy of the simple in this life an anticipation of the joys of Heaven.

SERMON V.

THE EPIPHANY THE TRIUMPH OF SIMPLICITY.

Videntes autem stellam gavisii sunt gaudio magno valde.

And seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

(Words taken from the 10th verse of the 2nd chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.)

THESE words, my brethren in Jesus Christ, seem as if they were meant to point our thoughts to the one great characteristic feature in these wise Kings which we may call the foundation of the graces which God heaped upon them. In the few verses in which their story is sketched by the Evangelist, we find this characteristic virtue standing out in the picture over and over again. The virtue which I mean is their noble and childlike simplicity. It was their simplicity which helped them readily and at once to leave their distant homes and to undertake their long journey into Judæa for the sake of paying homage to the Child of Bethlehem. Their simplicity was the basis of their courage and constancy in that long search, and especially of their perseverance under the trials and difficulties which met them on their arrival at Jerusalem. We see it again in the candid fearless openness of their questions, when they had come upon the capital city of the holy nation, and found no one, either King, or Priest, or people, thinking about the new-born Child, and yet, without any hesitation, they

boldly asked, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? We have seen His star in the East, and have come to worship Him." Again, there is the same transparent and unsuspecting candour in their telling all they know about the star and the time of the birth of the Child to the crafty King Herod, His enemy and theirs; and again, in their accepting the commission to go to Bethlehem and seek for the newborn King, and then come again and inform Herod concerning Him. We see, once more, their simplicity in their ready obedience to the nightly vision or dream which warned them not to endanger themselves or the Holy Family by returning to Herod; and as I said at first, we see it in the pure intense and childlike joy with which they hailed the sight of the star which they had seen in the East when it once again went before them and stood over where the young Child was.

I. It is the property of simple souls to have this intense joy in the favours of God; they have the secret, my brethren, of taking to themselves and rejoicing in their heart of hearts even over the common blessings of Providence, and over the blessings granted to others, and much more over signal and special favours to themselves. Their faith is deep, and penetrates every fibre, so to speak, of their life and conduct, their words and intentions are all candid, pure, open, honest, single, they live and move and act without effort as in God's presence, as His dear privileged children, and with Him alone in view. They have a special clearness of vision to discern His mysteries and interests, a special gift of conversing with Him

and receiving the communication of His secrets. And so they possess two great elements of strength and power which are often wanting to other Christians—a calm indomitable unconscious courage in all difficulties, an elevation above the world and human respect, in themselves—and besides this, in the second place, they carry about with them, as it were, a shield of the special protection of God, Who never lets them fall into the snares which the enemy lays for their unsuspecting and confiding honesty, and Who will rather interfere preternaturally and guide them by particular revelations than allow them to perish or be hurt in the dangers which they are too high-minded and too guileless to suspect.

Surely, my brethren, we see both of these special gifts in the case of these wise Kings. They take their stand beside the manger-throne of the Infant Jesus, with Mary, and Joseph, and the shepherds: Mary, whose simple humility won for her the privilege of being the Virgin Mother of God; Joseph, whose simple charity and gentleness were crowned by the blessing of being the foster-father of Jesus and the worthy spouse of Mary; the shepherds, whose simple faith earned for them the honour of being the first of human beings to come and worship our Lord at His birth, in company with the Angels. But Mary, and Joseph, and the shepherds, all belonged to the chosen people of God, and, besides the immense sanctity of the Mother of God and her spouse, their very condition of life and their history ensured, as we may say, their simplicity. The shepherds came and went, and their visit was the talk of the neighbours,

poor people like themselves, for a time, and then its memory died away. It made no mark, no noise, in the world. But it pleased God that His Son should have other witnesses, and that the proud and savage Herod, the usurper on the throne of David, with the worldly and politic Priests who ruled the holy nation at Jerusalem, should be warned of that divine Birth which had taken place so close to them, and which had been so silent and quiet as not to attract their notice, though it was that appearance of the Incarnate God in the world to which all their prophecies looked forward, and for which the whole system of their religion was a preparation. It pleased God that, in a certain most true sense, the sound of this great event should go forth into the whole world, carried by the message which flew from mouth to mouth about the unheard of barbarities of the tyrant in his vain endeavour to quench the rising Light of the world in the blood of the Innocents. And for this great mission, which was to frighten Herod in his pride of secure power, to trouble the worldly lethargy of the Jews, to lay before the feet of the Infant God the mystical gifts which represented the homage due to Him from the whole human race, and to begin the great work of the foundation of the Gentile Church, destined to take the place of the synagogue in the favour and love of Almighty God, three simple men are chosen—simple in their following of that natural religion by means of which God meant to prepare the largest portion of the human family to receive His faith—simple in their credence of ancient tradition, simple though learned, simple though rich, simple though great and

powerful and royal according to the reckoning of the world. And their strength and force lie, not in their royal state, or worldly power, not in their stores of treasure, or their retinue, or their learning, or their industry, but in their simplicity ; before which Herod the King is troubled, and all Jerusalem with him, and yet troubled as they are, they can do nothing but minister to these holy Magi, they must search the Scriptures for them, interpret the prophecies for them, do their pleasure and their bidding in telling them where they will find what they want, and speed them on their way.

And as these blessed Kings have this internal gift of force and power, which carried them over so many difficulties, which made all trials easy to them, and before which the world seemed to bow down and quail as before its master, so also had they in a singular manner the external protection of God to defend them when the world which had crouched down before them turned after them as they went away to assail and wound them. Their simplicity made no defence and took no precautions, they went openly after their aim, and they let their enemies plot against them as they liked. And yet Herod with all his craft was made a mock and a laughing-stock by them, because God guided their steps, and His holy Angels kept watch around them. They went on their way unhurt and rejoicing, they had accomplished the mission for which they had been sent in the providence of God, they bore away with them the blessing of Jesus, a great increase of spiritual gifts, the gentle smile and the gracious words

of Mary the Virgin Mother, and in after years they became the Apostles of the Child-God Whom they had been the first of the Gentiles to honour, and, as the Scripture says of the Saints of the Old Testament, "Their bodies are buried in peace, and their names live unto generation and generation."* Their graves are honourable in the Church of Christ, and their names abide on earth and in Heaven among the eternal glories of the Kingdom of God.

II. Such was the triumph of simplicity around the cradle of Jesus Christ, and at the very outset of the Gospel history and of the foundation of the Church. And now, my brethren, when this glorious virtue is set before us as so specially guarded and favoured by God as it is this day, we are inclined sometimes to be disheartened, and look upon it rather as a natural and incommunicable gift of character, than as a Christian virtue which we may aim at and practise and make ourselves perfect in. We are accustomed to think of simplicity as we are of gentleness, or sweetness, or modesty, or amiability, as the characteristic of certain persons who are such and such by nature, and who have been kept so by circumstances of education or worldly condition, as a thing of beauty to be admired and gazed on where it exists, but not as a thing which those who have it not can gain by prayer and diligence in the imitation of Christ. It is true there is a natural simplicity, as there is a natural gentleness or a natural sweetness of character in some people, which makes them easily beloved, and gives them a readiness in bearing trials patiently and

* Eccclus. xliv. 14.

in not losing their peace under provocation. These are beautiful natural gifts, and on them Almighty God often founds great spiritual perfection either in the same kind or in a different kind. I say a different kind, because this is remarkable about the work of God in souls, that He sometimes chooses for certain great virtues those who are naturally disposed to them, while at other times those whom He raises high in some line of perfection are just those who have had naturally a character which is inclined rather to the contrary extreme. Now He takes some gentle yielding heart and pours into it an immense gift of strength and zeal and force; now He takes a naturally angry or proud person, and makes him, by the continual practice of self-conquest, the type of meekness and gentleness and humility to the men of his generation, so that those who have known such persons only in the days of their perfection can hardly believe it when they are told that the Saints whom they have known have been men of the strongest and most violent natural passions.

Now, what we are specially to remark is this, that the virtues which are produced in the soul by labour, by the working of the Holy Ghost and the conflict and training of the will, corresponding to grace, and exercising itself continually in internal and external acts of the kind in which this perfection is to lie—these are the true virtues which produce great results in the service of God, and are crowned by great rewards in the Kingdom of Heaven. We see, for instance, in little children, humility and gentleness and generosity and trustfulness and candour and readi-

ness to forgive and purity, but we see these virtues in them as flowers blooming in a sheltered garden, not as well-grown trees, whose roots are deep in the earth, and whose branches have stood the gusts of a hundred storms. The childlike character has to be copied by us—rather it has to be continued on and transformed by grace superseding nature, as a statue of some precious metal grows out of the frail mould in which it is cast, the same, it may be, in outward form, but strong instead of fragile, solid instead of a shell which a blow can shatter. So it is with all the virtues which are so beautiful in their natural bloom—they cannot stand the conflict of life, the waste of years, the wear and tear of trial; it is grace alone working with the efforts of the human will that can form their Christian and heavenly counterpart in the manly robust character modelled after the example of the Incarnate Son of God.

And so, my brethren, in particular of this virtue of simplicity. It was no mere human simplicity, such as we see in little children, or sometimes in men of no depth of thought or strength of character, it was no natural perfection alone which carried these wise Kings so gloriously through all their trials, and made them so dear to God. The simplicity which they display is the simplicity of consummate sanctity, such as we see sometimes in the strong servants of God who have had to deal, like them, with the great ones of the earth, and to accomplish mighty works for the sake of Jesus Christ. We see it in St. Teresa, carrying through her reform by simplicity and prayer, in the teeth of furious opposition from those who ought to have

helped her, unaided, even at one time all but proscribed by the highest authorities in Church and State. We see it in St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier, dealing in their simplicity with Kings and Princes in Europe and in the farthest East, in St. Vincent of Paul at the Court of France, in St. Francis of Sales, and a hundred more. But it is not a virtue for Saints alone, but for all Christians who aim at perfection. It is not a virtue for Monks and Nuns alone, for peasant girls or country Priests, or poor labourers—it is a virtue which we may say is even more needed by us in proportion as we mix more with the world, and aim at that most difficult of tasks, the joining the life of the world with the service of God. I say it is more necessary for us in proportion as our vocation brings us more into the busy path of human life, into the whirl of society, into the conflict of politics, across the aspirations of science and learning: The more multifarious and conflicting and important are the elements with which we come in contact in our daily life, the more need have we of simplicity to bring them all into unity of purpose and under the blessing of God. The man of business needs it, if he is to be honest; the statesman needs it, if he is to be just; the student needs it, if he is to escape pride and vanity; the rich man and woman need it, if they are to make a Christian use of their riches; we need it in our prayers, we need it in our intercourse with our friends and those whom we love, in our enjoyments, if they are not to be hurtful to us, in our prayers and devotions, if they are to escape the taint of hypocrisy and self-delusion.

And, my brethren in Jesus Christ, what we all need, that we all can gain by the grace of God. Christian simplicity is founded upon the gift of faith. Where faith is bright and unclouded, it fills the mind and the heart with a love and a light from Heaven, and the characteristics of light and of love are unity and simplicity. Faith grasps God, reaches forth to God, is filled and penetrated with the thought of God ; and so, where faith is cherished, and allowed to rule the heart and animate the whole life, there must be simplicity, there must be that which is the practical embodiment or practical exercise of simplicity—purity of intention in everything. It requires great watchfulness over ourselves, because our selfishness is never quiet, and is always seeking to satisfy itself in this way or that, irrespective of or against the interests and the glory of God. So the faith which is to produce this golden fruit of simplicity of heart must be fed by heavenly contemplation, and by study of the greatness and the goodness of God. Its proper and highest food is found in the Divine Perfections—God in Himself made the object of a boundless and all-absorbing love—and God cannot be known and loved unless He is considered and contemplated. Then we must add to this consideration those others of the infinite love and endless benefits bestowed upon us by God ; nor are we forbidden to dwell upon the ineffable joys of the blessed in Heaven, or even on the miseries of those who have lost God for ever, in order to make ourselves more perfect in the entire devotion of our souls and intentions to God. We must watch over ourselves also, and beat down the

ever-rising claims of selfishness, tame our passions, and mortify our very judgments and thoughts, in order to obtain that purity of intention and singleness of aim which is the fruit and the evidence of Christian simplicity. And, as intention is the guiding principle of our whole life and of every action in our life, as it is that which gives to each its value as good or bad in the sight of God and in the accounts on which the next world will depend, so it requires to be renewed, and corrected, and perfected, and ennobled, day by day, action by action, by all watchfulness over our hearts and thoughts and aims, by perpetual self-examination and constant prayer.

And, when this has been done, there is yet another field of labour and conflict before we have attained the Christian simplicity of which we are speaking. In regard to our service of God, simplicity means perfect purity of intention ; in regard to our dealings with our neighbours, simplicity means perfect guileless limitless charity. It means the complete carrying out of those precepts of our Lord which bid us not to judge that we be not judged, to forgive if we would be forgiven ; which require of us absolute generosity in regard to the good gifts which God gives to others and not to ourselves, which teach us to rejoice in every one's good as if it were our own. Here again, my brethren, the more we mix with the world the more need we have of this virtue, the more occasion have we to turn away from detraction, and envy, and rash judgment, and the desire of pre-eminence, from the love of revenge, the petty selfishness which makes us look upon the success of others as our own loss,

and rejoice in our own gain as in a loss to them. As long as there is pride, or rancour, or bitterness, or any other passion left untamed in our hearts, so long is it impossible to us to enter on the possession of the peace and joy of the perfectly simple heart.

I say, my brethren, the peace and the joy—and thus we come round again to our text, the exceeding great joy which God gave the Kings when they saw the star which they had lost sight of for a time. The simple heart is ever rejoicing; it finds food for joy even in the slightest things, even in the things in which, if it were not simple, it might see causes for pain and anxiety. There are regions in the world where we are told that on account of the extreme purity and clearness of the atmosphere the sunshine is tenfold brighter and the sun's heat is tenfold warmer, where the colours with which nature is clothed in sea, and sky, and mountain, and tree, and flower, are ten times more beautiful than with us in the foggy regions of the north. The simple heart is like one of those fair and happy spots, over which, as the old fable runs, the sky was pierced,* so that the genial influences of Heaven came down straight in their full power, instead of being broken, and tempered, and diluted by a thick intercepting atmosphere. Joy is the crowning mark of great gifts of God. The wise man tells us that God gives to those who are good in His sight, first wisdom to seek Him and love Him, then knowledge, that they may have the key to all earthly things that cross them in their

* "Ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες ἐνθαῦτα ὑμῶν ἐπιτήδεον οἰκέειν ἐνθαῦτα γὰρ ὁ οὐρανὸς τέτρηται (Herod. iv. 158).

pilgrimage to Him, and last of all, joy* in seeing His Hand in everything and in loving everything for His sake, Who is so infinitely good and infinitely beautiful, and Who sheds His goodness and His beauty in such profusion upon His creatures. And so, my brethren, if God will give us His grace to render ourselves simple, He will give us this perpetual feast and sunshine in our hearts also, and make us share the calm, deep, intense, overflowing happiness which He gave to His faithful servants. We need all their simplicity and their courage, their frankness, openness, and boldness, to confound the world, and bear on high the witness of our Christian profession; we need their simplicity too as the earnest and pledge of the special favour of God, and His peculiar protection against all our enemies; we need it if we are to have in this life any share in that priceless gift which makes all things easy—the “exceeding great joy” of heart which is the foretaste of the heavenly blessedness, the pledge and earnest of the recompense promised to us when we shall enter into the joy of our Lord.

H. J. COLERIDGE, S.J.

* “God hath given to a man that is good in His sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy” (Eccles. ii. 26).

SUMMARY.

SERMON VI.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT; OR, SELF-DENYING OBEDIENCE.

Ecce Angelus Domini apparuit in somnis Joseph dicens, Surge et accipe Puerum et Matrem ejus, et fuge in Ægyptum; et esto ibi usque dum dicam tibi. . . . Qui consurgens accepit Puerum et Matrem ejus nocte, et secessit in Ægyptum.

Behold an Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in his sleep, saying, Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and flee into Egypt; and remain there till I tell you. . . . And Joseph arose, and took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt. (St. Matt. ii. 13, 14.)

INTRODUCTION.—Sequence of the Christmas mysteries.

I. The historic facts recorded in the New Testament like the grain of mustard-seed—apparently very small, but capable of great development. The flight into Egypt an example of this. The difficulties which St. Joseph and our Lady confronted in obeying the divine order. Christians have received a like order, and find the like difficulties. How do they generally meet them?

II. The perfectness of our Lady and St. Joseph's obedience. They conquered each temptation by an exercise of the opposite virtue. An act of one virtue implicitly includes acts of many other virtues. Two properties of their obedience—promptness, fulness. The application to ourselves.

PERORATION.—By obedience we cooperate with God in His Providence.

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(Words taken from the 13th and 14th verses of the 2nd chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.)

THE three Kings had come from the East, and had paid their visit and made their offerings to the sweet Babe of Bethlehem; and had fallen down and adored Him, in humble acknowledgment of His supremacy as the King of Kings. Following the order of festivals, we may suppose that they arrived at the royal city on the twelfth day. Yet a month longer after this Mary remains in Bethlehem, probably in some modest cottage, which St. Joseph had been able to hire when the multitude, which had come up to that town for registration, had returned home. As, at the expiration of this time, the days of her separation according to the Law were

accomplished, she goes up to Jerusalem to present her Blessed Son in the Temple, to submit to the ritual of purification, and to make the prescribed offering to the Lord. Having exactly fulfilled the Levitical precept, the Immaculate Mother and St. Joseph prepare for their immediate return to Nazareth.

About the same time Herod is at length aroused from his fancied security. He had fondly imagined that the Magi had not come back to visit him according to their promise, because they had, when too late, discovered their folly and were ashamed to face him; and he had joked and mocked at the credulity of these Easterns, who had been so thoroughly duped by a mere exhalation of the air. But now the sayings of holy Simeon and of Anna have been noised abroad in Jerusalem, and have found their way into his palace. Other confirmatory reports have added to his alarm. Zacharias, doubtless, had talked much with his brother Priests about the new-born Messias. And so the tyrant is now wholly bent on securing the safety of his crown by murdering the Child.

While he is preparing for the execution of his execrable scheme, the Holy Family is already on the road back to Nazareth. Then it is, while it is halting for the night, that an Angel appears to St. Joseph when asleep, and tells him to get up, and take the Child and His Mother and flee at once into Egypt, for that Herod is seeking the Child's life. St. Joseph rises, awakens the Blessed Virgin, and they, carrying the Babe with them, set out at once by

night for Egypt. This is the story ; let us see what it teaches.*

I. Jesus has said in the Gospels—*Simile est regnum cœlorum grano sinapis, quod accipiens homo seminavit in agro suo ; quod minimum quidem est omnibus seminibus : cum autem creverit, majus est omnibus oleribus, et fit arbor, ita ut volucres cœli veniant et habitent in ramis ejus*—"The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field. Which is the least indeed of all seeds ; but when it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and dwell in the branches thereof."† And as I suppose that we may call the written Word of God, when it is received in our understanding, the Kingdom of Heaven within us, we may safely accommodate this divine parable to the Sacred Scriptures, and most of all to the facts recorded in the New Testament. I say, then, that this history of the flight into Egypt is, like its fellows, the smallest of all seeds. It only takes two verses to tell it. Yet, when it has been sown in the field of our hearts, and is suffered to grow up by continued contemplation, it becomes a tree ; in whose wide-

* In the sequence of these mysteries of our Lord's early life, I have adopted the order of St. Bonaventure, without intending thereby to pronounce an opinion on its merits over other ways of reconciling the seeming discrepancy between St. Matthew and St. Luke. It suited my purpose. It is only fair to add that in all points save one it is supported by the authority of SS. Chrysostom and Anselm. These Fathers suppose the flight to have taken place from Nazareth, where the Holy Family had, according to them, already arrived. This is the only divergence.

† St. Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

spreading branches our thoughts, soaring above the earth and winging their way upwards, may, like birds of the air, come, and dwell, and find shelter and heavenly repose.

Perhaps you are inclined to doubt what I say, beloved brethren. You see nothing in the mystery which we are contemplating but the record of a simple and ordinary fact of daily life, scarce worth the telling, save that it concerns such exalted personages. Well, let us see. Put yourselves for one moment, if you can, in the place of St. Joseph and our dearest Lady. The former has had a certain intimation and a certain order, while he was asleep. It was, in fact, what we should call a dream. And on the strength of this nocturnal visitation he acted. Would not the thought have at once come across your minds—"Is it safe or prudent to act upon anything so doubtful in its very nature as a dream?" To put the whole case more vividly before you, let us imagine that the tempter came to St. Joseph. And why not? For no one, however exalted in sanctity or office—no, not even Jesus Himself, *the* Holy One—has been free from his assaults. He first of all assails the Patriarch with the doubts to which I have just alluded, and tries to impress upon him that to obey such an order, under the circumstances, would be sheer superstition. Not succeeding in this his first effort, we may suppose that he urges St. Joseph further. "What matter," he suggests, "if Herod *is* seeking the life of the Child; surely the Messiah, the Anointed of God, can defend His own! And would it not be a glorious triumph for Him, and

more likely to conciliate the attention of the world to His claims, if He should stay and overthrow His adversary by some startling manifestation of His power, rather than thus to turn coward, and escape by ignominious flight?" But this temptation to presumption does not answer. So the enemy transforms himself into an angel of light, and continues in this wise—"At least have some pity on the chosen race. Is not the Messiah destined to save His people Israel, and to sit upon the throne of David His father? How can He save them, if you carry Him off far away from them? How can He sit upon a throne, which you deliberately yield to its present usurper? Surely He would be able to do more good by remaining in the land of promise than by wasting years—you do not know how many—in a strange place, where He is neither known nor expected, nor likely to be treated with even decent respect!" As this temptation under the garb of a zeal for souls is equally a failure, the enemy changes the form. "Would you," he insinuates, "for one moment entertain the thought of insulting the holy Child committed to your keeping, by hurrying Him off, and burying Him among a people given over to the lowest and most degrading form of idolatry? Is it likely that the infinitely holy God would send you such an order?" This will not do. But the devil has not as yet exhausted his resources. He now tries a lower and more ordinary form of temptation. "You will not," he whispers, "dream of starting at all events for the present. The winter is not yet gone by, and the roads will be well-nigh

impassable. The days are short ; the nights long. At such a season, to undertake so long a journey would be nothing short of madness." "This is a mere suggestion of sensuality," retorts St. Joseph. "Well," urges the tempter, "if you care nothing on your own account, at least you ought to consider your delicate Spouse, and the Child not yet two months old. Have you a right to subject them to such peculiar hardships, and all, too, at the instigation of a mere dream ? Or if these considerations should have no effect in shaking your determination, are you prepared to encounter yourself, or to subject them, to the perils of the road—that long traversing of the desert—the all but certain fate of falling into the hands of robbers and brigands—probable starvation from want of the necessaries of life ?" St. Joseph is firm. And once more he is assailed with a fresh temptation. "What will your friends say of your escaping furtively by night, when they come to know it ? Will they not, naturally enough, be scandalised ? Why cannot you wait at all events for a day or so to let them know, and take your leave of them according to the custom ?" This failing, he makes a last effort. "You are half-way back to your quiet cottage at Nazareth. *There* is your home. *There* you are known, and *there* you can get employment, such as will enable you to support your sacred charge. Your tools are there, your workshop, your customers. And you are rashly going off at a moment's notice—a poor workman, without means of support—into a land where you are utterly unknown, and where all Jews have ever been held in peculiar

abhorrence! It looks very like tempting Providence."

It is not impossible that our dearest Lady was assailed with the like temptations; and we may picture to ourselves with what alacrity of horror she drove them from her as she fondly gazed on the smiling face of her Blessed Son. But there was one remaining, which would hardly have escaped the sagacity of the arch-enemy, and with which, as adapted to her position only, he may have specially plied her, only that she might the more triumphantly crush the head of the old serpent by her profound humility. He may have whispered to her—"If this message was to be sent, why was it not brought to *you*? You are always in prophecy coupled with the Child, not Joseph. Jesus is your especial care. His conception was announced to you by Gabriel, why not also His flight into Egypt? In any case the least your husband could have done would have been to consult you, ere determining on so dangerous a step."

Now, my dear brethren, there is just enough of truth in these false reasonings to make them plausible. The enemy of the human race is far too astute to ply us with a palpable and simple lie. Indeed, his premisses are not unfrequently true; but then he contrives to draw a sophistical conclusion. And I will be bold to assert that, if we had been placed in the same circumstances as those which confronted St. Joseph and our Lady in the history which we are at present contemplating, the greater number of us would have yielded to one or other of

these deceptions. Nay, what is more : if the story could come to us fresh, told to us for the first time, and stripped of its divine sanction, I fear me much that many among you would be the first to condemn the rashness and indiscretion (as it would seem to you) of St. Joseph's conduct. It certainly is what the world is doing every day, whenever it ventures to criticise the supernatural action of the Church. And are you free from the influence of its tone ? You will perhaps accuse me of harsh judgment. Well, you shall be your own judges. When the commands of God or of His Church are difficult, and seem to run counter to what men are pleased to call common sense, how fares it with you ? Should He secretly inspire you, as though in a dream, with a thought of, or a desire after, a higher level of piety than that to which you have as yet attained, how do you treat these heavenly visitations ? I will take one instance (which, however, includes a great deal) to assist you in forming this estimate of yourselves. All of us, but most especially you who live in the world, have received a divine order that you must carry Jesus Christ with you into Egypt. For the world, with its business, its pleasures, its offices and dignities, its public opinion, its comforts, is your Egypt. And you are bidden, as I said, to take Jesus along with you there. You are told that you must be poor in spirit at least ; for this, in a certain degree, is necessary to your salvation. In other words, the supreme will of God must be for you the measure of all that you have, are, and do in the world. You must use all these things only so far as they assist you in

getting to God. Let your reflection carry out this rule into daily, hourly practice. Realise the fact that you must use riches only as stewards, who have to give in their account to the one great Proprietor; that your profession or business must be carried on in the way that God wills, not as you like; that such things must not govern you, but you them; that you may participate in the world's pleasures, first of all, only so far as they are innocent to you personally, and then so far as you can use them to assist you in praising and serving God, and working out your own salvation; that the world's offices and high places are not for you, unless they help you towards the same great end; that its public opinion is all vanity and deceit, to be despised and loathed when it runs counter to the unerring voice of God or of His Church; finally, that its comforts and luxuries are for the most part traps and pitfalls, of which it behoves the servants of God to be very wary. Lest your conscience should still sleep under the vagueness of mere generalities, apply this canon of conduct to particular actions of your life. Test by aid of it that particular money transaction or bargain which you have just concluded, the acceptance of that brief, the marriage which you are arranging, the purchase of such a piece of jewellery, your presence at such a ball or at that favourite opera. What do you say to all this? Do you relish this flight into Egypt? Would you not prefer to keep Jesus in Nazareth or in Jerusalem, while you go down there? In other words, are you not inclined to say in your hearts—"I see no great difficulty in keeping up my religion

at home before my crucifix, or in church at Mass and Benediction; but I certainly never reckoned on having to carry Jesus Christ with me to my office or place of business, or to balls and parties, or to the market-place, or on steamboat or railway." And upspring a goodly host of temptations very like to those we have already enumerated. You say to yourself, or rather the evil spirit whispers in your heart—"Is not this going a little too far? Is not such an idea the superstitious dream of a recluse? Cannot Christ take care of me, rather than I of Him, when I am in the midst of my worldly avocations? Does not common sense dictate that the Church is the proper home of my Saviour, not the rude current of active life? Besides, what an endless system of mortification to take on one's shoulders! One can never be one's own master for a single hour." Again—"Is it possible to keep up to such a pitch of piety through the dangerous bye-roads of common life? Shall I not be more liable to fall? And if I do fall, will it not be a fall more dangerous, more fatal, more notorious?" Yet again—"Will not the Catholic religion and its Divine Author be subjected to derision and insult if I carry my Lord with me among these Egyptian idolaters, with their worship of money, pleasure, esteem, and contempt for all besides?" Or again—"If I were to attempt this ethereal sort of life, how thoroughly I should be laughed at by friend, relative, acquaintance! They would make fun of my scrupulosity, condemn my singularity, and carp at my unpractical and unbusinesslike habits. My family would complain that I

had cast a gloom over their social intercourse, and I should be universally ostracised as a nuisance."

Tell me now, after calm consideration, whether my judgment was unnecessarily severe. Here we have all the temptations of St. Joseph over again. Do they get the better of you, or you of them? The command of the Angel was, it must be confessed, a difficult one. And we need not doubt that St. Joseph found it so. For sanctity does not consist in having no difficulties, no repugnance on the part of our lower nature, but in bravely confronting these when they arise by a firm will animated with divine love. In fact, that sanctity is not worth much which is forced in a hot-house, and cannot live out-of-doors. But the Patriarch nobly stood his ground. Should we have done the same, again I ask, if we had been in his place?

II. I must however pass on to the second point which I have selected from this Christmas mystery. Let us endeavour, dear brethren, to realise the prompt obedience of St. Joseph and the Immaculate Mother to the divine command.

The holy Patriarch rises at once from his bed, though it is yet night; and prepares without a moment's delay to set out on this dangerous journey. Thus it is that he puts to flight all the temptations of the enemy. He first of all knows full well by an interior light that the message is no mere phantom of a sleeping imagination. He is then tempted, as we have supposed, to presumption. He conquers by the *humility* of obedience. He is tempted to confide in his common sense. He conquers by the *faith* of

obedience. He is tempted to sensuality. He conquers by the *mortification* of obedience. He is tempted to cowardice. He conquers by the *fortitude* of obedience. He is tempted by a Pharisaical zeal. He conquers by the *charity* of obedience. He is tempted to human respect. He triumphs by the noble *independence* of obedience. He is tempted by family affection. He triumphs by the *indifference* of obedience. He is tempted by thoughts of home. He conquers by the *divine love* of obedience.

In like manner, our dearest Lady is no sooner waked from slumber by St. Joseph, and informed of the order he has received, than she makes ready at once, and with all haste; wraps up the Divine Child for the journey, and calmly sets out in the night air for the far distant land assigned them for their temporary home. She joins with St. Joseph—and with what unspeakable perfection!—in his great victory of obedience; and baffles the Evil One in his vain attempt to awaken in her spotless Heart feelings of wounded self-love; and instantly tramples the temptation under foot by the profound humility of a double obedience—obedience to her God and Creator, and obedience to St. Joseph as His representative. *Ecce ancilla Domini; fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*—“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to Thy word.”*

You have seen by what I have said, dearly beloved, that virtues, like vices, never grow alone. For as one act of vice often includes the malice of many other vices, so in like manner an act of super-

* St. Luke i. 38.

natural virtue wakes to life a multitude of others. So was it with this act of obedience which we are at present contemplating. It was one chord indeed of a most Heavenly anthem; but that chord was a harmony of many notes. Samuel is inspired to say to the prevaricating Saul, *Melior est obedientia quam victimæ*—"Obedience is better than sacrifice."* But the Patriarch of the New Covenant unites sacrifice with obedience; spiritualising the one, perfecting the other.

I now proceed to invite your attention, devout brethren, to two properties which specially characterise this obedience of our Lady and St. Joseph. The one is its *alacrity*. No sooner is the command received, than it is put in execution, even at the dead hour of the night. *Nescit tarda molimina Spiritus Sancti gratia*, says St. Ambrose—"The grace of the Holy Ghost does not know the delay of difficulties." It leads those whom it inspires straight ahead; giving such simplicity to the eye of the soul as that it merely measures the narrow path, and is blind to the precipitous abysses which yawn from below on either side. An obedience which, on receiving its order, gapes, and rubs its eyes, and turns on its bed, and at last crawls to its duty at a snail's pace, is a sort of sleepy obedience, which is not likely to take Heaven by force.

Another characteristic of the obedience of our Lady and St. Joseph is its *fulness*. I do not refer to the exactness with which they followed out to the letter all that had been revealed to them by the

* 1 Kings xv. 22.

Angel. I mean something more than this. For it does not in any way appear that a particular route was intimated to them as the one which God wished them to take. They had apparently perfect liberty of choice. Now if they had gone down to Joppe, and taken ship there for Egypt, the journey would have been much easier, shorter, less dangerous, less fatiguing. But Mary and Joseph were guided in their choice by a supernatural instinct. They knew what would be most dear to the Heart of the Babe of Bethlehem. So they chose the path of greater poverty and mortification; and thus purified, by a supererogation of obedience, that same wilderness which had been defiled of yore by the repeated disobedience of a stiff-necked and rebellious people.

Omnis Scriptura, says St. Paul, *divinitus inspirata utilis est . . . ad erudiendum in justitia*—"All Scripture inspired of God is profitable . . . to instruct us in justice."* How much more so is for us that part which narrates the action of the Holy Family! Do not suppose, my beloved brethren, that such a lesson is intended only for Monks and Nuns, and others who follow the Evangelical counsels. It is true that these are admitted to the liberty of a more entire and nobler obedience than what is required of persons living in the world. But there is an obedience which is essential to salvation, and which is therefore required of all. And that obedience goes further, and requires more of you, than you might at first sight be led to believe. It is over you as a law of conduct at every hour, in every occupation, at every

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

period of life from boyhood to old age. And your practice of that obedience may be servile, tardy, reserved, unloving, miserly; or it may be filial, prompt, full, affectionate, generous. It may, as it were, say snappishly to God—would that even so much could be said in the most restricted sense by the greater number!—*Ecce habes quod tuum est*—"Lo Thou hast what is Thine."* Or again it may, in the spirit of devotion, exclaim with St. Paul, *Domine, quid me vis facere?*—"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"† or with the holy child of the Temple, *Loquere, Domine, quia audit servus tuus*—"Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth"‡—heareth only to obey the slightest intimation of His will. That such obedience costs much at times, I do not deny. That it will involve continued mortification and self-restraint, I am free to own. But in the long run it is easier, just because it is complete. For a habit, when complete, becomes a second nature; and natural actions are always easy. On the other hand, a half-and-half obedience, which mathematically lays down its own limits, and gloats over an ambiguity of law, is intermittent, uneasy, stiff, and repulsive. It moves, so to speak, in a strait-jacket, and is uncomfortable enough all through. It settles down contentedly to the function of a slave, and can never hope to be admitted *in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei*—"Into the glorious liberty of the children of God."§ But an obedience like that of Mary and Joseph, hearty and unreasoning, is an omen of victory in this world and

* St. Matt. xxv. 25.

† Acts x. 6.

‡ 1 Kings lii. 10.

§ Rom. viii. 2.

the next. *Vir obediens loquetur victorias*—"A man of obedience shall be able to speak of victory"—*—of victory over himself and the importunities of his lower nature; of victory over his neighbour by the humility of subjection, which must show itself outside, and by the subjugating force of his example; yes, and in a certain sense, of a victory over God also; for He says by the mouth of His Prophet, *Audite vocem meam, et ero vobis Deus, et vos eritis mihi populus*—"Obey My voice, and I will be to you a God, and you shall be to Me a people."† To the obedient are promised peace and happiness in this world; for it is written, *Si audierint et observaverint, complebunt dies suos in bono, et annos suos in gloria*—"If they shall hearken and obey, they shall complete their days in happiness, and their years in glory."‡ For the obedient is reserved a complete reward in the next; for Jesus, Who learnt obedience by the things that He suffered, "is made to all who obey Him the Author of eternal salvation"—*factus est omnibus obtemperantibus sibi causa salutis æternæ*.§

One more crowning thought there is, with which I will conclude. Even in a matter so unworthy as the exercise of brute force, man finds a sort of satisfaction, when his joint action concurs to the production of a great mechanical result. And I presume that, if there be such excellence in that self-government which is the idol of public opinion and our modern statesmen, it must in some degree consist in the content and satisfaction which the governed

* Prov. xxi. 28.

† Jer. vii. 23.

‡ Job xxxvi. 11.

§ Heb. v. 9.

feel in the consciousness that each one of them contributed his part towards the united political action of his country and its Government. Such satisfaction in its highest and noblest form is reserved for the man of obedience. Mary and Joseph yielded a blind submission to the divine message; and thereby concurred, as we know from the Evangelist, towards the fulfilment of a prophecy uttered more than eight centuries before by the prophet Osee. So all supernatural obedience helps God to execute the designs of His goodness. It is true that the divine will is always omnipotent in the long run. For if, as St. Austin remarks, it is not accomplished in and by us, it will be accomplished on us at least by a retributive justice of which it is terrible to think. But it is also true that God's will in the moral government of the world depends in great measure for its accomplishment—for so has He been pleased to ordain—on the free choice of each of us. Nor let us be seduced by the imagination, that our acts of obedience are too little and insignificant to be allowed to play a part in the divine work of the world's regeneration. We cannot move a pebble without affecting, mathematically at least, the centre of universal gravitation. One small touch of the painter's brush often gives the likeness to a portrait. History records, in every chapter, the momentous effects which have resulted from causes the most trivial. And what is verified in nature, art, and human science, vindicates to itself the dignity of a law in the supernatural order. Christian obedience—to return to our immediate subject—is sweetly contagious, is easily taken, and has a great

power of assimilation. However insignificant its external acts may be, they are a power. For God is in them. The life of our Lady was a very ordinary one to the eye of sense. So was the life of Jesus for thirty years. Yet the one and the other have been the pattern and foundation of Christian sanctity in its highest and most heroic manifestations. And a like effect, though of course within a narrower sphere, and of a feebler sort, is produced by the smallest acts of submission to God's law or wishes. And here it is, if we are children of obedience, that we shall find our joy and consolation. We are always working with God; *Dei enim sumus adiutores*—"For we are God's coadjutors."* We are answering, after our poor measure, to the desire of His good providence. We contribute to the unity of His government; we help in the distribution of His mercies. He has deigned in the counsels of His foreknowing wisdom to connect our obedience with the decrees of His predestinating love. It is hardly too bold to say that He has taken us into partnership with Himself. And thus are we allowed to aid in building up the City of the Saints. We are winning victories for Jesus and His Father, extending the triumphs of grace, strengthening the empire of truth and justice, attacking the disobedient spirits in their very citadel, and promoting, in a degree beyond the power of words, the greater glory of our Creator and Lord. Ever in the world of human life and human action may be heard the harmony of God's unalterable will and unconquerable love by those who have ears to hear; and we, by our obedience, are

* 1 Cor. iii. 9.

admitted within the chosen orchestra. Yet a little, and that harmony shall be perfected on earth, the apparent discords resolved, the heavenly idea evolved in all its complex parts. It will then mount upward, and fill for ever the City of the Saints, to be the everlasting anthem of Angels and the multitudinous Redeemed. In that anthem the obedient will have their part ; for their will has been God's will throughout. Their notes of loving subjection and filial adoration will be the same in Heaven as on earth ; yet not unchanged. For the music of time is transformed like ourselves into His likeness, Who fills all things with His own perfection. And the obedience of faith will be transformed into the obedience of the Beatific Vision ; an obedience only not free, because absorbed in His blessed will, Who draws all wills by an irresistible attraction to Himself, when in the fulness of His glory He is seen, as He is, face to face.

THOMAS HARPER, S.J.

SUMMARY.

SERMON VII.

THE HOLY FAMILY IN EGYPT.

Et erat ibi usque ad obitum Herodis.

And Joseph remained in Egypt till the death of Herod. (St. Matthew ii. 15.)

THE condition of the Holy Family on its entrance into Egypt. Difficulty of treating the subject. Unity of idea has been sacrificed to completeness.

I. The first entrance into Egypt. The fall of the idols before the presence of Jesus. A similar miracle occurs in the daily history of the Church. Reasons why our Lord fled into Egypt. (1.) Because the Egyptians had shown kindness in past times to His chosen servants. Illustration of the same in the history of England. (2.) Because so many Jews were residing there. God used the cruelty of Herod for the spread of His empire; and the like occurs now.

II. The residence of the Holy Family in Matharea, near Heliopolis. The cottage where our Lord dwelt was in a garden of balsam-trees with a fountain in the midst; spiritual application of this legend. Reasons why Jesus chose this spot for His residence. (1.) It was near the Temple of Onium; application of this reason to ourselves. (2.) There were a multitude of His people there; application of this reason. (3.) It was the place where the Patriarchs had once lived.

III. The residence of the Holy Family at Hermopolis in the Thebaid. The probable reason of this change of dwelling. The isolation of the Holy Family there. The miracle which took place on our Lord's arrival in that town. The liberation of the creature by the Incarnation; and the effect such a fact should have on ourselves.

The gradual fruits of our Lord's visit to Egypt, as revealed in ecclesiastical history, are the proofs of the virtue that went out of Him while yet an Infant.

SERMON VII.

THE HOLY FAMILY IN EGYPT.

Et erat ibi usque ad obitum Herodis.

And Joseph remained in Egypt till the death of Herod.

(Words taken from the 15th verse of the 2nd chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.)

A LONG and painful journey was that which the Holy Family had undertaken in obedience to the heavenly message. But it is at last accomplished ; and the august travellers now enter the land of Egypt. We can easily picture to ourselves the venerable Patriarch, footsore and tired, carefully leading with one hand the ass, on which our Lady is seated ; while his other grasps the staff, with which he sustains his faltering steps along the rough, uneven road. Mary is absorbed in celestial contemplation ; and the sweet Babe of Bethlehem is safely nestled in her arms. The three have had to endure much from cold, hunger, thirst, and weariness, in their long march across the desert. But each has forgotten his own in painful compassion for the suffering of the others. Mary has done her best to preserve her Blessed One from the winter's chill, keeping Him closely pressed to her virginal bosom ; and has been more than recompensed by those ineffable radiations of love which passed from the Heart of the Child to the Heart of the incomparable Mother. And now

they have arrived in the country which has been assigned them as a temporary refuge. Foreigners, unaccustomed to the ways and customs of this over-civilised and corrupt people, ignorant of their language, unacquainted with their roads and cities, St. Joseph and our Lady only exchange one form of trouble for another. The instant need of food and shelter makes itself felt too plainly. The necessity of repose for the Infant Jesus has been long weighing on the Mother's mind. The danger and inconvenience of wandering, houseless, about a thickly-populated and strictly-ordered kingdom present themselves to the anxious forethought of the Patriarch. Yet how can he even explain his wants? And where can an interpreter be found among that rural population, which he has naturally to encounter first? He knows, of course, full well that God protects, and will provide for the needs of His own elect; so that he never loses the confidence of faith. How could he, seeing that the Lord Himself is in his company? But this does not lessen his responsibility. For he knows also that, in the ordering of the Divine Providence, the Mother and her Child depend on his exertions for the supply of what is necessary to their support. Again; how are the hearts of all three pierced with sorrow at the proofs of idolatry which meet their eye at every turn!

Thus they travel on, my brethren, under the divine guidance, exhausted with fatigue, towards the populous city of Heliopolis. Once arrived there, we may readily believe that, among the many Jews dwelling in that place, they meet with some compas-

sionate fellow-countryman, who satisfies their immediate want, and who gives or procures them lodging for the night. We may further suppose that, under his guidance, they proceed next day to Matharea, a village in the neighbourhood; where they agree to take a little cottage, accommodated to their modest wants, as a settled place of residence.

Here let us pause, beloved, for we have now reached the immediate point of our present contemplation; and I desire, before we go further, to take you into my confidence. I think that, by my doing so, you will be better prepared to follow the course of thoughts to which I propose inviting you. When then I chose this mystery of our Blessed Lord's sojourn in Egypt for your consideration, I found myself on the horns of a dilemma. I saw at once that if I were to preserve that unity of idea which is generally so essential to a sermon, I must sacrifice the fulness of the history; while if I did my best to set before you all the particulars of that prolonged exile, I must of necessity be not a little discursive. I have chosen the latter, as being the less of two evils; and I confidently trust that He, from Whom proceeds, "every good and perfect gift"* (*omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum*) will make up to you for what is wanting in symmetry of development, and will bless to your progress in holiness whatever shall be said to His glory; so that you may know more intimately, love more heartily, and imitate more generously and constantly, the divine model presented to your devout contemplation.

* St. James i. 17.

I. Allow me to direct your thoughts, dear brethren, first of all to the entrance of the Holy Family into Egypt.

There is one event connected with it which is commended to our notice by such a weight of testimony that I could not afford to omit it, even if it were not as full of instruction and consolation as it really is. Isaias had long before made it a subject of prediction in these words: *Ecce, Dominus ascendet super nubem levem, et ingreditur Ægyptum; et commovebuntur simulacra Ægypti a facie ejus*—"Behold, the Lord will ascend upon a light cloud, and will enter into Egypt; and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence."* Ezechiel seems likewise, though less distinctly, to refer to the same prodigy, where he writes, *Hæc dicit Dominus Deus: Et disperdam simulacra: et cessare faciam idola de Memphis*—"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I will also destroy the idols; and I will make an end of the idols of Memphis."†

Now, whether "the light cloud," mentioned in the former passage by the evangelical Prophet, be meant to represent the robe of our human nature with which the Eternal Word clothed Himself as with a garment, or rather His Blessed and Immaculate Mother, matters little to our present purpose. For in any case the prophecy refers to the flight into Egypt, if we may trust to the authority of Origen, St. Athanasius, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Eusebius, and St. Anselm—to say nothing of many other Doctors of the Church and commentators of a later age. We

* Isaias xix. 1.

† Ezechiel xxx. 13.

are furthermore told, on similar testimony, that upon the arrival of the Divine Infant the idols fell down before Him, and were broken to pieces. Whether this is to be understood as including all the idols of Egypt, or, as seems more probable, of those only whose temples were in the road along which our Lord passed, we have no means of ascertaining. But thus much we do know, viz., that the prophecies were accomplished. And this startling miracle was a presage of far greater wonders in store for this demoralised people.

Such is the power of Jesus' presence! Such is the strength of His weakness! So great a victory does He already gain by His inconceivable humiliation! And a like miracle is renewed, my brethren, in the soul of every man when Jesus takes up His abode within it. Most Christians will, I doubt not, be free to own that their hearts have been, at some time or other in the past, a second Egypt, given over to many idolatries. It may have been idolatry of self. In the case of some there may have been idolatry of things sensual, as of comforts, luxuries, and the like. In others again there may have been that love of money which, as St. Paul tells us, is *simulacrorum servitus*—"the worship of idols."* Or there may have been, with or without these, idolatry of fame, or of knowledge and worldly wisdom; or again, of rank, influence, connection. In some there may have been idolatry of learned, or courageous, or polished men. In others there may have been the more refined and æsthetic worship of a sort of bastard

* Coloss. iii. 5.

Christianity, dressed out in flounces and brocade, too velvety to face the rigours of Mount Calvary, and too unreal to excite even the attention of the devil. But when Jesus enters, all these ideas fall from their places, and are cast out. He will brook no rival. The first act of His presence is to cleanse the sanctuary which He has chosen. And most instant and vigorous is His indignation against worldliness in all its forms. If needs be, He will use the cords with which He purified the Temple of Jerusalem. He means what He says when He admonishes us in the inspired words of His favourite Disciple, *Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea quæ in mundo sunt. Si quis diligit mundum, non est charitas Patris in eo*—"Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him."*

There is another thought connected with our present subject which is full of consolation, and helps us to realise a little more clearly the wondrous tendernesses of the Sacred Heart. It is natural for us to inquire why our dearest Saviour should have paid this visit to the land of Egypt. For we know of course, devout brethren, that every event of His life, even to the minutest circumstance, has been arranged by Himself from all eternity in the counsels of His predestinating love. Why then did He arrange that He should be driven forth into a land of idolaters in these the early months of His infancy?

I think that I am safe in suggesting two reasons; though doubtless there were many others. And one

* 1 St. John ii. 15.

is, that Jesus desired to show his gratitude to the Egyptians for the reception which they had given, first of all, to Abraham and Sarah his wife, afterwards to Jacob and his sons, and, later on, to Onias the High Priest and a multitude of his fellow-countrymen, who had fled with him into Egypt on the outburst of a fierce persecution. There is something inexpressibly touching in the thought. It brings home so powerfully to our minds those words of His, *Amen dico vobis, quamdiu fecistis uni ex his fratribus meis minimis, mihi fecistis*—"Verily I say to you, as long as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me."* He does not forget a single act of kindness, however small, which is shown to His little ones—children, the poor, orphans, widows, slaves, captives, the distressed, and desolate, His representatives—though He may delay its recognition. Our thoughts here naturally revert to the more recent history of our own country. In a past generation England, at a great cost, liberated all the slaves that were under her dominion. Those slaves were very dear to Jesus Christ, because they were slaves. For He is specially at home with all the varied forms of human misery and sorrow. Again, before this, she had exercised a liberality and kindness, not easily surpassed, towards those emigrant Priests who had sought her shores while escaping from the French Revolution. Those Priests were His consecrated servants, and were suffering for Him. Jesus saw the work of love, and His Heart was deeply moved. The time of recompense is come;

* St. Matt. xxv. 40.

and I am not the only one to see in that unusual profusion of graces which are preluding her gradual return to Catholic unity, a sweet and most abundant reward for those two national acts of a generous and disinterested charity.

The other reason which seems to have induced our dear Lord to flee into Egypt was, that there were at that time nearly a million Jews residing in that country. And as He was specially sent, as He tells us, "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (*ad oves quæ perierant domus Israel*), He goes forth thus early to seek them out, because they stand most in need of His help. For they were sojourners in the midst of a strange land given over to idolatry and sin. I suppose that this too is verified each day in the history of grace. What, for instance, is the explanation of those wonderful conversions which are the staple fruits of our missions and retreats, and which so often brighten, with a joy not easily expressed, the arduous labours of the confessional? How is it that we see such multitudes of sinners, who have lived for years without God in the world, plunged up to the neck in hideous sins, suddenly taking the place of Magdalene at the foot of the Cross, and bathing the feet of their Redeemer with the fruitful river of their tears? I have but one answer to give. Behold, O ye children of men, the mercies of the Sacred Heart. They are prodigal children, and Jesus is the compassionate Father, looking out along the road for their return. They are sufferers from a loathsome leprosy, and He is the good Physician, Who reveals

* St. Matt. xv. 24.]

to us the great rule of His practice where he says, *Non egent, qui sani sunt, medico, sed qui male habent. Non veni vocare justos, sed peccatores ad pœnitentiam*—"They who are in health need not a physician, but those who are ill. I came not to call the just, but sinners to penance."* They are wandering sheep, and He is the Good Shepherd Who goes in search of them, and when He has found them, carries them on His shoulders rejoicing.† They are sinners, and He is the Friend of sinners.‡ They were dead to grace, and He is the Son of Man who came to seek and save that which had perished.§ It is a gladsome lesson. Well may we exclaim in the inspired words of the Wise Man, *Parcis omnibus; quoniam tua sunt, Domine, qui amas animas*—"Thou sparest all; for they are Thine, O Lord, Thou Lover of Souls."||

Thus our most loving Redeemer repeats in Egypt His double Epiphany. He manifests Himself there, as He has done in Bethlehem, to Jew and Gentile. And the words of holy Simeon are already in part fulfilled, that the Child of Mary was to be the salvation of God, prepared before the face of all peoples, *Lumen ad revelationem Gentium, et gloriam plebis tuæ Israel*—"A light to be revealed to the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel, Thy elect."¶ Strange love of God, which converts the malicious cruelty of a tyrant into an instrument for the salvation of souls; and for the regeneration of a whole people who knew not their Creator, and obeyed not His law! Herod thought, in

* St. Luke v. 31, 32.

† St. Luke xv. 4, 5.

‡ St. Matt. xi. 19.

§ St. Luke xix. 10.

|| Wisdom xi. 27.

¶ St. Luke ii. 31, 32.

the madness of his pride, to deprive Judea of her promised King. He does but add Egypt to that empire whose establishment he dreaded. The Babe of Bethlehem is driven from His royal city. He sets up His throne of grace elsewhere, till the time shall come for Him to return and claim His own. History, they say, repeats itself. And Jesus has worked like wonders, from age to age, in the fortunes of His mystical Body. The Church is driven from the East ; she conquers savage hordes in the West. She is persecuted, manacled in Europe ; she conquers a new world in America. She is oppressed, harassed in the South ; she sets to work to regain what she has lost in the North. The Herods of our race have not learnt wisdom by experience. They still dream of exterminating the royalty of Jesus by State-craft and crooked policy. And what will be the end thereof ? The Psalmist shall tell us, *Qui habitat in cœlis irridebit eos; et Dominus subsannabit eos*—"He that dwelleth in Heaven shall laugh at them; and the Lord shall hold them in derision."* His mercy will use their malice to extend the triumphs of His saving grace; and the greater their efforts to exterminate His empire, the more complete will be at once their discomfiture and the victory of His regenerating Cross.

II. I now proceed, my brethren, to consider the residence of the Holy Family in Matharea, on the outskirts of Heliopolis. There is more in it than at first meets the eye; more especially if we assist our imagination with certain traditions which have pre-

* Ps. ii. 4.

vailed among both the Christians and infidels of those parts. I do not mean to endorse them as undoubtedly true because I use them. They may be true or false. It is not certain that our Lord was in Matharea at all. But it suffices for us if they can aid us a little in realising somewhat of the life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, in the land of exile.

It has been stated then that the cottage where these three holy ones took up their abode was situate in the midst of a garden stocked with balsam-trees, and watered by a small but abundant fountain. In its stream our Lady is said to have washed the clothes of her Child ; and the stone is, or was pointed out, on which she was wont to lay them out to bleach.* There most probably St. Joseph plied his trade as a carpenter, and the Blessed Virgin contributed, by the produce of her needle, to the common resources. You see the life was a very simple, a very homely one. There was nothing very striking or extraordinary about it, if we look at it on the outside. Christian heroism is, for the most part, within. It lies hidden in the inflamed intentions of a will sacrificed to God's glory. Great occasions do not arise every day. And the sanctity of the Gospel is not meteoric. Like a star, it shines on tranquilly and constantly through the courses of the night. True love of God is shown most of all in little things. It makes them great, and, in proportion to its intensity, all but infinitely great. So was it in the case of our Lady. Her incomparable devotion raised each commonest action of her life to a dignity of merit far beyond all

* See Barradius, *ad loc.*

the collected merits of the Angels and Saints in Heaven. So true is it, as St. Gregory remarks, that God does not look at the greatness of what we give Him, but at the greatness of heart with which we make the gift—*Deus non respicit quantum, sed ex quanto.*

But are there no thoughts suggested by the nature of the place in which Jesus lived, as the tradition to which I have referred has painted it? I think we can discover much. It was surrounded by balsam or balm trees. Now the gum or sap of these trees was in great use for purposes of medicine in those days; and was highly esteemed for its invigorating and healing properties. Indeed it still finds a place in our pharmacopœia. Is it then altogether without meaning when He, Who is the strength of the weak, surrounds Himself with so pregnant a symbol of His mission? Is it not He Who, as the Psalmist says, *sanat contritos corde; et alligat contritiones eorum*—“healeth the broken of heart and bindeth up their bruises?”* Is it not He who promises by the mouth of Jeremias the Prophet, *Obducam cicatricem tibi, et a vulneribus tuis sanabo te*—“I will close up thy scar, and will heal thee of thy wounds?”† Is it not He Who proclaims concerning Himself, *Spiritus Domini super me; propter quod unxit me, evangelizare pauperibus misit me, sanare contritos corde, prædicare captivis remissionem, et cæcis visum, dimittere confractos in remissionem*—“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; wherefore He hath annointed Me; to preach glad tidings to the poor He hath sent Me, to heal the

* Ps. cxlvi. 3. † Jeremias xxx. 17.

contrite of heart, to preach deliverance to the captives, and sight to the blind ; to set at liberty those that were bruised ? ” * What rich consolation is there in this thought of Him as the true balsam for our miseries ! He comes as the universal Saviour, the good Physician of our souls. He comes as the kind Samaritan of the Gospel. The human race had fallen among thieves and highwaymen, and was sadly wounded, covered with bruises and putrifying sores. Jesus comes to pour the oil of gladness and the wine of consolation into them, and to bind them up. While yet a Babe, He begins His art of healing, Himself the medicine ; and—if we may trust an ascetical writer of no little eminence—many in the land of Egypt received at that time their souls’ health at His hands. How everything in the history of our Incarnate God is, from first to last, designed to encourage an unreserved confidence in His love and mercy !

There is also mention of a fountain in the midst of this aromatic garden—a fountain, as we are told, small but most abundant. And who of us, dearly beloved, does not at once call to mind the words of the Prophet, *In die illa erit fons patens . . . in ablutionem peccatoris*—“In that day there shall be a fountain open for the washing of the sinner ? ” † Thus, if we may say so, the three most necessary Sacraments were present at Matharea, as it were by anticipation. *There* was the baptismal stream, *there* the balsam of penance, *there*, above all, the living Bread Himself, Who came down from Heaven.

These thoughts may perchance seem fanciful to

* St. Luke iv. 18, 19 ; Isaiah lxi. 1.

† Zacharias xiii. 1.

some of you, my brethren. Yet is it not true that whatever concerns Jesus and His Blessed Mother is full of heavenly symbol and deep mystery? Modern critics would fain rob us of these lessons of wisdom by tying us down to the mere letter. I own that I prefer the reverent richness of Patristic exegesis, which sees deep truths hidden beneath each sentence of Scripture, and each smallest action or circumstance connected with the Word Incarnate.

But I must pass on to another point connected with this part of my subject. I will again put it in the form of a question. Why did our dearest Lord select Heliopolis, or rather its neighbourhood, for His place of habitation when He fled with His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph into the land of Egypt?

My first answer to this inquiry will, I think, at once commend itself to all who hear me. We learn from the Jewish historian, Josephus,* that when Onias IV., the High Priest—son of that Onias who is mentioned so honourably in the Second Book of the Machabees—fled into Egypt, with a great body of his countrymen, in order to escape from the tyranny and cruel persecution of Antiochus, he so far conciliated the esteem of the reigning Ptolemy and of his wife Cleopatra, that they allowed him a large tract of ground close by Heliopolis, where he built, with their full permission, a temple in imitation of its venerable model on Mount Sion. The fugitive Jews clustered round it, and the town thus created was called Onium, after the name of its founder. Here there was a regular Levitical Priesthood, and

* *De Bello Judaico*, vii., 30.

the ceremonial of the Law was observed in all its fulness. The due worship of God was kept up there till the reign of Vespasian. It was therefore still going on at the time of our Lord's stay in Egypt. The Holy Family accordingly selected for their residence a place which would be near Onium, in order that they might be able to observe all the requirements of the Law, and might worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in a place consecrated to His holy name. It was no small consolation, doubtless, to Joseph and Mary that they could thus, in a strange land given over to idolatry, join with their fellow-countrymen in the prescribed sacrifice of praise to the Divine Majesty.* My brethren, do you find any likeness of yourselves in this picture? If you have found it necessary to change your residence, has your first and main care been to choose a place which was near a Catholic Church? Alas! how often does it happen that, under

* There seems to be some considerable doubt as to whether the erection of such a temple was permissible, and was not rather a violation of that Church unity which was, even under the Mosaic dispensation, so dear to God. The divine law, as given in Deut. xii. 5, is understood by many (among others by Tirinus, in Isa. xix. 19, and Dan. xi. 14) to forbid it. The Jewish historian, Josephus, speaks of the act of Onias in the severest terms (see his *Antiquities*, xiii., 6). St. Jerome is apparently of the same mind. For whereas Daniel had predicted that "the children of prevaricators of Thy people shall lift up themselves to fulfil the vision, and they shall fall" (xi. 14), this great Doctor interprets the prophecy of the work of Onias, who had relied on the prediction of Isaias, which declares that "in that day there shall be an altar of the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt" (xix. 19), as sanctioning what he did. Calmet, in his *Dictionarium Biblicum* (ad v. Onium), limits himself to the assertion that "the Priests of Jerusalem were not at all pleased with this temple; and that by reason of it constant disputes arose between

such circumstances, even respectable Christians make this quite a secondary consideration, if indeed they think about it at all. They will inquire with minute care about the nature of the soil, the attractive features of the place, the healthiness of the neighbourhood, the supply of water, and so forth. They are not contented unless they have satisfied themselves on these important points by a personal visit of inspection. They are very anxious to get all possible information as to the sort of society to be found there. But whether the Blessed Sacrament is at a convenient walking distance from the house, whether they can get to Mass on the week-day as well as on days of obligation—of this they make but little count. Yet is it not very strange? Is it possible that they can realise what it is to be near to Jesus in the tabernacle of His love? Why, what is a fine landscape, or a spacious drawing-room, or preserves, or refined intercourse, in comparison with the graces to be gained by hearing one Mass with

the Jews of Palestine and those of Egypt." Tirinus, in spite of his opinion that it was not altogether licit in its origin, admits, nevertheless, that this temple at Onium may be considered as a type of those Christian altars by which the prophecy of Isaias was really accomplished. One would be led to believe from what has been adduced that this worship of the Egyptian Jews was not schismatical. If it was, of course our Blessed Lord would have held it in abhorrence, and would have avoided, no less than St. Joseph and our Lady, any sort of communication with it. It would indeed have added a fresh and most acute pain to those others which attended His exile, and would thus teach us another very profitable lesson, which is especially useful for these times. In such case, all that has been said in this part of the sermon about the temple at Onium could be transferred to the orthodox synagogue, which would without doubt exist in a large city like Heliopolis, where the number of resident Jews was so considerable.

true devotion? There is no other way of explaining such a marvel, save that which is conveyed in the words of the Prophet: *Desolatione desolata est omnis terra; quia nullus est qui recogitet corde*—"With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is no one who considereth in his heart."*

But there is another answer to my question, which by no means excludes the first. For there is no reason to conclude that our dear Lord had only one motive for His choice. I say then that He was probably moved to settle near Heliopolis because of the multitude of Jews who were in the neighbourhood. Onium was a sort of Jewish colony, and it is easy to understand how the chosen people would congregate in a neighbourhood where they would be free to enjoy the fulness of their religious worship. Here then surely would Jesus be led by the love of His Sacred Heart. He seems, all through His life on earth, to have had a special feeling for His own people, which we might almost venture to call national. We hear, as it were, through the three-and-thirty years, the echo of that tender plaint of His: *Ferusalem, Ferusalem . . . quoties volui congregare filios tuos, quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas, et noluisti*—"Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldest not."† He went then to Heliopolis to do His best for His people; though probably there, as in Judea, St. John's words were verified: *In propria venit, et sui cum non receperunt*—

* Jerem. xii. 11.

† St. Matt. xxiii. 37.

“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”*

Apply this lesson again to yourselves, dear brethren. Do you, when choosing a place of habitation, think once of looking out for a spot where you may be able to do good to those who stand most in need of spiritual or corporal works of mercy? Even in the arrangement of your works of charity is this motive uppermost? I will illustrate what I mean by an example. If you have purposed to build a Church, do you determine to lay its foundations, not where it may simply be more convenient for yourselves, but where it may have the best chance of supplying, in some measure, the spiritual destitution of our Catholic poor? I would to God it were so. We should not then see—as, to our sorrow, we so often do—grand churches built in parks or rural districts, where they are comparatively little wanted, while, perhaps, the great town close by sits desolate in her widowhood. And we should not then have reason to lament that a noble work of generous devotion, first suggested by a whisper from the Sacred Heart, should have its merit lessened, or even, perhaps, spoiled, by the self-love and self-will, which have been allowed free play in the execution.

Another probable reason has been suggested for the selection of Heliopolis as the place of abode for the Holy Family. It is to me a most touching one, for it reveals another trait of the delicate sensibility and tenderness of the Heart of our Divine Master. This neighbourhood had, in times past, been assigned

* St. John i. 11.

by Pharaoh to Jacob and his sons, when they went down into Egypt. So Jesus willed to give Himself the consolation of dwelling, like them, as a stranger in those very parts, which were haunted by the memory of His dear children, the Patriarchs of the olden time. There He lived their life over again in thought, sympathised with their sorrows and difficulties, and recalled to mind their deeds of justice and of piety. In particular He bethought Him often of His chosen type, the chaste Joseph, the saviour of his brethren, whose wife was a daughter of the High Priest of this very town, known in those earlier days by the name of On.* If only, my brethren, we strove to remember Him as He remembers us; to hold Him in our hearts, as He holds us; to be as affectionate, after our poor measure, towards all that concerns Him, as He is affectionate towards all that concerns us! His whole life is one continual message to us, which is conveyed in the words of His Prophet: *Et in charitate perpetua dilexi te*—"Yea, I have loved you with an everlasting love."†

There is one other thought connected with this first place of sojourn, which is suggested to us by the name itself of the Egyptian town. If a sparrow does not fall to the ground without the will of God, and not one of them is forgotten before Him,‡ and if every hair of our heads is numbered in the Divine Providence and Wisdom,§ it is not unreasonable to suppose, as pious commentators have done, that the great Father took into account the name of that city

* Gen. xli. 45.

‡ St. Luke xii. 6.

† Jerem. xxxi. 3.

§ St. Matt. x. 29, 30.

which should be honoured with the presence of the Incarnate Word. And that name is full of meaning. It has, in truth, become the city of the Sun—of a Sun Who has risen upon Egypt, upon Israel, and upon the whole world, giving light to the intellect and a living heat to the will of man. We are reminded of the words of Holy Scripture : *Orietur vobis timentibus nomen meum Sol justitiæ, et sanitas in pennis ejus*—“Unto you that fear My name, the Sun of justice shall arise, with healing in His wings.”* A thick darkness had long brooded over that land of idols. Long had it lain in the night of death. But, *Populus qui ambulabat in tenebris, vidit lucem magnam; habitantibus in regione umbræ mortis, lux orta est eis*—“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great Light; on them that dwell in the region of the shadow of death, Light is risen.”† And again that prophecy of the same Prophet is fulfilled : *Non occidet ultra sol tuus, et luna tua non minuetur; quia erit tibi Dominus in lucem sempiternam; et complebuntur dies luctus tui*—“Thy sun shall go down no more, and thy moon shall not decrease; for the Lord shall be unto thee for an everlasting light; and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”‡ Truly then, O Egyptian city, art thou called the city of the sun; for, *Venit lumen tuum, et gloria Domini super te orta est*—“Behold, now has thy light come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon thee.”§

III. While I find it hard, devout brethren, to reject the statement that our Blessed Lord sojourned in Heliopolis, supported as it is by grave authority,

* Mal. iv. 2. † Isa. ix. 2. ‡ Isa. lx. 20. § Isa. lx. 1.

it is at least equally probable that he remained also, during some portion of the time of His exile, at Hermopolis, a city of the Thebaid, something like half-way between Cairo and Thebes. This fact is distinctly stated by Sozomen, an ecclesiastical historian of the fifth century, who confirms his statement by the addition of a remarkable circumstance, to which I shall presently allude.* The two traditions therefore must be reconciled. Now, without pretending to determine what has not been revealed to us, I shall suggest one possible solution, which will, in any case, help you to meditate with fruit on this mystery of our dear Lord's life. It is just possible, then, that the fact of the residence of the Holy Family in Heliopolis became known to the suspicious and frightened Herod. It might easily have been talked about by those Jews who, doubtless, from time to time paid a visit to Jerusalem. Of course they would not fail to tell how the idols had fallen miraculously from their places in the various temples on the arrival of the holy Child. All this might have come to the knowledge of St. Joseph either naturally or by revelation, and he would then in all probability take the immediate precaution of retiring further south, where he might remain unnoticed with our Lady and the Infant Jesus, and where the influence of Herod would be less felt, and his crafty policy less formidable. Thus were the plans of God's mercy accomplished, and the Thebaid also blessed with His incarnate presence.

It is as well to notice that the mountains close in the valley of the Nile on both sides—so that it is not

* *H. Eccl.*, v., 20.

more than seven miles broad—almost as soon as you leave Heliopolis. The desert, too, begins to hug the western range. Jesus is come there to sanctify even the desert by His grace, and to sow in it the seeds of a future life.

But what an isolation for the Holy Family ! They are now far distant from the temple at Onium. The number of Jews in middle Egypt was, as is most probable, comparatively small, and there was nothing in Hermopolis to relieve the horrors of that idolatry which pressed, like a foul nightmare, upon the whole people. Yet I must correct myself, dear brethren. For there was some consolation still—nay, every consolation—for Joseph and Mary. Their God, the sweet Babe of Bethlehem, was with them. And He abundantly made up to them for the loss of temple, public worship, or company of the Faithful. That true Light shone in the darkness, even though the darkness, for the most part, comprehended It not.* But Mary and the venerable Patriarch comprehended It, and having that Light in their dwelling, like Israel of old, felt not the Egyptian darkness.†

We may take this consoling lesson home to ourselves. It may well be that, in the good providence of God, we may have our share in some such isolation. Some of you who now hear me may be called at the voice of duty far from all fulness and splendour of Catholic ritual. You may find yourselves in places where the Faithful can be easily numbered on your fingers, and where heresy and worldliness are supreme. Yet, let the chapel be ever so miserable, its sacred

* St. John i. 5.

† Exod. x. 23.

furniture ever so unworthy, its congregation ever so small and insignificant—what matters it, so long as you have Jesus with you in the Sacrament of His love? How all the appurtenances of architecture, sculpture, painting, gorgeous decoration, of music, rich vestments, stately processions, fade into less than nothingness during that all-important half-hour after Communion, when our hearts are chosen to be the ciborium, the tabernacle, the church of Jesus Christ! Such things may be necessary for those who have nothing else to help them; we, beloved Catholics, can afford to do without them. Nay, more: If at God's bidding we should find ourselves stript even of His sacramental presence; if our lot should be cast at any time among Pagans, and far from church or Priest; if we should be voyaging the sea in ships, or traversing the desert, or scaling mountains, at the call of mercy—we shall never be alone even then. Stript of all besides, we can never be separated from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, unless we consent to give Him up by the commission of mortal sin. And He will be to us a church; He, the Priest; He, the Sacraments. Blest solitude indeed, if endured for Him, supported in Him, shared by Him! He will make up abundantly for all that we have sacrificed in obedience to His will. He says to us, as He said to His servant Abraham: *Noli timere, ego protector tuus sum, et merces tua magna nimis*—"Fear not, I am thy Protector, and thy exceeding great reward."*

There is an incident connected with our Lord's sojourn in Hermopolis, which I must set before you,

* Gen. xv. 1.

my brethren, before I bring my sermon to a close. The same ecclesiastical historian whom I have already quoted mentions, on what he clearly believed to be trustworthy evidence, that upon the arrival of Jesus at Hermopolis, a tree, which by reason of its unusual size and beauty was held in idolatrous veneration by the people of the place, bent prostrate in adoration before Him as He passed by. Sozomen adds that, after this, its bark was gifted with a miraculous virtue, by which the sick were instantaneously freed from their divers diseases. Beautiful legend! So true is it that if man will not own his Redeemer, the brute and senseless things at least shall show forth His praise. That same tree, formed to be a natural revelation of God's goodness and wisdom to the children of men, had been misused, perverted against its own natural bias and end to the dishonour of the Creator. This was man's doing. *Vanitati enim creatura subjecta est, non volens*—"For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly." It was forced into being made an instrument of rebellion and base idolatry. But it was not to be so always. *Quia et ipsa creatura liberabitur a servitute corruptionis, in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei*—"For the creature itself shall be delivered from the slavery of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." The time was come which it had so long expected. "It had been groaning and travailing in pain until now."* Jesus passes by. It worships, is delivered from its bondage, and becomes an instrument of many graces. My brethren, this thought should make us pause. It

* Rom. viii. 20, 21, 19, 22.

should lead us to ask ourselves how we use the creatures which our good Father has put into our hands. It is our privilege and duty to attune them to His praise. They are dumb in themselves; we give to them a voice. What if we dishonour and insult Him by means of His own gifts? What if we use them for purposes of sin and of a disordered sensuality? Is it not an inexcusable sacrilege? Can ingratitude go further?

Moreover, since the Incarnation the visible things of nature have put on a new life, and have been in part admitted already "to the glorious liberty of the children of God." They have become channels, instruments of grace. They have been made sacred symbols of celestial things. Matter has been united to God, reigns now with God in Heaven, and its accidents are become the veil of His most loving presence on earth. The natural Bible has been united to the supernatural, because Jesus recapitulates all in Himself. No wonder that miracles are now, as it were, a rule of God's action in His Church. For grace permeates the whole realm of creation, and, when it pleases, supersedes all physical law. But then, by how much the creature is endued with a new sacredness and a deeper mystery, by so much the more does it demand at our hands a habitual reverence. For we are ever touching the vestments of the great God. He is looking out upon us from every one of His works.

To conclude. The sceptic, the materialist, and the man of what is called practical common sense, are likely enough to look down with a self-satisfied sneer

on this mystery of the divine sojourn in Egypt. They will say in their hearts—"What good can come of all this? A Babe, a Child, is in the midst of a Pagan people. He is living in obscurity and poverty. He has no powerful friends, no earthly resources or advantages. The land where He lives is in the hands of a strong Government. It rejoices in the pride of its wealth, in the refinement of its civilisation, and in the influence of an established religion bound up with all the traditions and old memories of the nation. But this Infant is under the tutelage of a poor Jewish carpenter, unlettered and utterly unknown. What can He do? Nay, what did He do? Jesus returns after some few years, still a Child, with His parents to Jerusalem, and what did He leave behind Him? Was idolatry destroyed? Did Egypt own the Nazarene? Were multitudes found to pay Him homage, or did Christian churches rise up on all sides from the ground, like flowers of spring, in His wake? The records of history present us with no such miracle. They speak not even of His coming and returning, unless we except the Gospels. And these barely mention the fact, but boast of no results. Everything seems to have gone on as it did before. The temples were still open, still frequented. The fallen idols were set up again in their niches, and experienced no decrease in the number of their devotees. Surely, then, an impartial critic must be forced to own that this Egyptian visit was a failure, if its object was such as you have just described. And the only reasonable explanation of it is the simple and patent fact that the Holy Family found safety in flight alone."

Thus the world argues, my beloved brethren, according to the light that is in it. Thus do its pet children rely with a contented self-conceit on what they conceive to be their logic of facts. In these our days more particularly they take a pleasure, and exert themselves with a fanatical but suicidal zeal, to prove to themselves and others that Jesus of Nazareth is not their Redeemer. I suppose that they do not consider themselves in need of one. However that may be, it is a great pity that they are in such a hurry to form their scanty inductions. They seem to think that the Divine Wisdom should order and arrange with that haste and bustling activity which is natural and necessary for themselves, who are but creatures of a day. *They* may be unhinged, it is true, if their efforts are not crowned with immediate success. But it is not so with God. He can afford to wait. For the whole current of time flows at the foot of His unchanging throne, and all its future is eternally present to the eye of His ever-watchful providence. For "a thousand years in His sight, is as yesterday which has passed, and as a watch in the night."* And so the Word has been sown in Egypt by His life-giving presence. But it grows not up in an hour. It remains in the ground, hidden, ere it begins to germinate. Some sixty years or so roll by, and the spring begins to burst forth. I see a noble Church arise gradually, from amid the ruins of Pagan superstition, in the fertile Delta. A patriarchal throne adorns her sanctuary, its first occupant one of the four Evangelists. She rapidly expands in peace. The idols fall before her, never to

* Psalm lxxxix. 4.

rise again. Yet a little, and that noble school of Christian philosophy appears upon the platform of history, whose eminence of learning draws disciples from all parts of the Roman Empire by the magic of its attracting influence. Doctors whose reputation extended far and wide, and whose names are still illustrious in the Church—a Pantenus, a Clement, an Origen—adorn its chair. Saints, famous in Christian hagiology, issue in succession from its gates to sanctify the world, and extend the triumphs of the Cross. The great desert, too, alongside of which the Holy Child had passed, is made glad, and its arid sands produce a rich harvest of grace. The Thebaid rejoices in its host of holy anchorites, who leaven it with Christ. Nay, this is not enough. The heavenly cultivation gathers strength, and pursues its onward course. “Ethiopia soon stretches out her hands to God.”* The spring has indeed come at last; would that heresy had not so soon, alas! blighted its early promise.

Has, then, the visit of Jesus to Egypt been, after all, a sterile flight? Behold what history answers. And am I over bold and fanciful when I ascribe these wonders to the presence of His Infancy? Beloved brethren, the evangelical Prophet shall be my apologist, the world’s instructor: *Lætabitur deserta et invia; et exultabit solitudo; et florebit quasi lilium. Germinans germinabit, et exultabit lætabunda et laudans. Gloria Libani data est ei; decor Carmeli et Saron. Ipsi videbunt gloriam Domini, et decorem Dei nostri. . . Ecce Deus vester ultionem adducet retributionis. Deus*

* Psalm lxvii. 32.

Ipse veniet et salvabit vos—"The land that was desert and impassable shall be glad; and the wilderness shall rejoice and flourish like the lily. It shall bud forth and blossom, and shall rejoice with joy and praise. The glory of Libanus is given to it; the beauty of Carmel and Saron"—Jesus and Mary. "They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the beauty of our God." And they saw it of a truth in the sweet Babe of Bethlehem. Therefore "take courage, and fear not; behold, your God will bring about the novel revenge of a most wondrous recompense." For not by Prophet, or Evangelist, or Apostle shall He work His miracle of mercy. No; "God Himself will come and save you."*

THOMAS HARPER, S.J.

* Isa. xxxv. 1, 2, 4.

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